

Transsentient

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Category: Halo, WALL-E

Genre: Adventure, Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2012-07-20 14:27:01

Updated: 2014-03-03 22:54:45

Packaged: 2016-04-27 02:18:46

Rating: T

Chapters: 30

Words: 87,269

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: 5 years on from the end of the war, Earth is in crisis with Humanity at war with itself. What's more, Eve's now a depressed wreck and no longer wants to be involved in the outside world. However, when she learns that former friends are in danger, she will attempt to help them, unaware that they will discover something dark about the Forerunner's past and a threat to their future.

## 1. Prologue

\_\*\*Well, Fanfic authors and readers, this is where the series ends with this last Fanfic. I have to say, these last two years of writing this has been a great and major part of my time so far on Fanfic, but, as with everything, it has to end somewhere and with this Fanfic it will. Also, just to quickly note, if this is the first Fanfic out of the series anyone is reading, please make sure you have read (in order) Combat Evolved, Delta Halo, The Ark and It's the trailer, Those who Fought and Battle of Reach, also along with their trailers, and the trailer to Transsentient so as not to get confused with the plot of this story. \*\*\_

\_\*\*Although you would have seen the outline of the plot in the story blurb, I will retell it once more. The war is over and now Eve is struggling to adapt to this new life whilst chaos is erupting on Earth, which is under mostly militaristic rule now, even in the West as well as the East. However, she will have to go on one last adventure that will unlock a further secret that will cover how the Forerunner race came into being, their earliest creations and even the creation of the Flood. It will also determine the fate of the galaxy in this last adventure Eve must go on to save not only herself but her friends and all sentient life as well. Some OC's\*\*\_

\_\*\*Well, let's begin this final journey.\*\*\_

\*\*Note: I do not own Halo or Wall.E \*\*

2557AD, the present year of the Christian calendar after the death of

Christ, in the Christian view, over two and half thousand years ago and over two to three million years since the first Humans had evolved. It has always been believed that in the future, Humanity would be a united race, spread out across the stars, no war between each other and everyone, at least in some sense, being equal. By this point, as many from the past believed, the future ancestors were to be technologically advanced and society much different from what it had been hundreds of years before, leaving behind all of the squalor and violence that had for so long plagued Humanity.

Oh, how wrong they were.

From the earliest days of their species, Humanity had been living in small tribes across remote areas of the world, leaving a marginal existence, completely unaware of what they would advance to one day. Then around the apparent death of Christ, Humanity had become a collection of civilizations, many of which were quite advanced, at least for their period or where they were in the world anyway, and ruled over all parts of the Earth. From the tribes of Africa to the emerging kingdoms of Rome in Europe, to the dynasties of China, Korea and Japan to the Mayas of the Americas, man was the dominant life form on the planet. From then on, however, as he had done many times before, he began to develop an insatiable appetite for advancement in technology, both physically, but also mentally as well.

Since then, as Humanity progressed technologically, more civilizations followed suite. Whilst new governments and religions were formed before and after the start of the Christian calendar, society changed with new discoveries in social order, class system and how to entertain one another. Humanity was quenching It's everlasting hunger for advancement, but with every new discovery, either of technology or for society, they wanted more and more and this continued right up to the first years of the 3rd millennium.

Unfortunately, with all these advancements for society and technology, many were used for one thing that was extremely common amongst all Humans on Earth; War. Ever since their first days, Humanity began to fight itself. First it was tribal warfare, then city state warfare between the Athenians and Romans and Egyptians. Then, it degenerated further to religious warfare with the Crusades, the war of the Americas, which was also for conquest and plunder, and what would lead up to the War on Terror. Then, the very motive of war decreased further from territory or plunder to extermination and the way/reasons it was fought changed as well. From religious warfare, it became racial, the most notable of this type being WW2 with the rise of the Nazis party that would eventually lead to the full scale extermination of those they deemed to be 'sub-Human' or even 'non-Human' and with the Japanese expansion from their home islands into the Pacific. Even from here on, the very way in which war was to be fought changed when two atomic bombs were detonated over Japan, thus marking the beginning of the Nuclear Age.

Since then, Humanity, despite being united in the UN, a global organisation of countries that struggled to stand by what it fought for from the very first days onwards, continued to fight itself despite the horrors of the first fifty years of the twentieth century, and all of it was over at least one the reasons mentioned above. There was Korea, a war for communist and capitalist territory, then Vietnam, another war of territory for the two superpower

governments, then conflicts in Europe, America, Africa and the Middle East, all for either religion, territory or racism, and then, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the so called resurgence of the 'War between Faiths', as it later became known in the last few decades of the twenty first century and the centuries following, when the Gulf Wars erupted and the eventual War on Terror.

Humanity did not get any better after this. In fact, their will to destroy grew more and more ferocious and began to affect not just the natural side, but the very cultural, economic and political sides of Humanity that their society was founded upon.

First, there was the debt crisis in 2008 following through to 2012 when final economic collapse came. Attempts for countries, notably the West, to end this did not have the results they hoped. Iraq had not solved it in 2003 and now neither had Libya in 2011 or Iran the following year. The American and EU resolutions for solving their debt rose and fell many times until late 2012 when the final collapse in November plunged the world into a depression that made the 1929 Wall Street Crash look miniscule, bringing warmth and food shortages to many and causing many businesses and banks to go bust, leaving millions all over the world in poverty even in countries that had for so long been deemed to be places where anyone could start a new life.

As well as economic crises', politics also affected many nations, notably Russia, Greece and the uprisings in the Arab world when changes in the governmental elections brought violence on an unprecedented scale to them. Very quickly, this began to spread everywhere else across the world when new governments bent on this so called 'freedom' theory arose in the Middle East, Europe, America and Asia rose to power and ended up doing little good for their people.

For a while it just seemed that nothing was going right for Humanity. As well as economic collapse and political struggles, the very planet around them began to die as well with what they were doing. Oil was being used up at a faster rate, as was coal and natural gas, the polar caps were still melting, global temperatures were rising and eventually environmental disasters were taking place across the globe such as the blazes raging in Colorado, followed by a heat wave in other parts of the country, earthquakes in Peru, a furthering of the drought on the Horn of Africa, torrential rain in India and Bangladesh and winter storms in Canada and the northern parts of Europe. Nature was striking Humanity as if it were taking revenge for all the years of destruction they had wreaked onto the environment. All of this added up to the problems faced by the leaders of the nations of the world but few could be able to do much against natural problems as well as their own man-made difficulties.

Then, to top it all up, as many feared with the so called doomsday phenomena in 2012, war broke out in November after a dispute in the Middle East and very quickly, the Human will to fight erupted like a supernova and the long feared WW3, also known as the war between East and West, the war that many believed would erupt only years after the end of WW2, finally came. Though, thankfully, the nations of the world had decided to never use nuclear weapons for they knew that if they did, not only would they be destroyed, but they would end up almost certainly reducing Humanity back to the tribal status it had once been many thousands of years before. Although the decision not

to use nuclear weapons would not stop the war, at least those not involved could breathe a sigh of relief that they would not be faced with a nuclear holocaust that this WW3 was interpreted to unleash when it happened.

Eventually, after eight years, the war finally ended in 2020, with the death toll estimated to be around 35-40 million, but those who had not died were to face a further deterioration of society. The war had used up a huge amount of reserves of natural resources, destroyed large swathes of land that would take decades to recover, accelerated the declining of the Earth's environmental system and left untold hundreds of millions homeless. Literally, society had collapsed in many areas of the world. Everything had failed to work and at the end of the war, the UN officially ended, beginning the so called, as many historians and people now in the twenty sixth century called it, 'Divided Era'. For ten years, it was literally every country for itself and conflict still continued in some parts of the world, particularly those where WW3 had hit them hard.

Then, in 2035, a man named Shelby Forthright, head of the, at the time, small business of BnL, probably the first businesses ever that ever really did work for Human equality everywhere, and his workers came up with the first ever rocket natural fuel source. Though extremely risky, they hoped to try it out with Humanity's rebuilding space programme, mostly destroyed by the war. It was tried and it, to the surprise of many, it worked. From here on, BnL helped accelerate the use and improvement of natural fuel sources such as solar, kinetic, producing clean water and getting rid of the large amount of Human waste left over from the war and the many years of neglect before it. In fact, when the BnL company began to expand across all societies and eventually into global governments, Humanity was actually beginning to become united once more under them. For about twenty years, it helped get Humanity back on It's feet, it helped feed the population and find homes and jobs for the poor. What was more, it gave equality to everyone regardless of wealth and class systems were abolished, well for most of the world, so all could enjoy this sharing of everything. As for Shelby, he became a global celebrity overnight and was loved by billions all over the world for helping get Humanity on the way back to It's prosperous position it had decades before.

However, there soon came another problem for Humanity. In 1900, there had been one billion Humans on Earth. By 2012, there were seven billion and twenty years on from that; the Human population had almost doubled to around 13 billion, already starting to stretch the available land space for Humanity. Even with the start of creating new lands in places such as Osaka bay or Tokyo harbour or the harbours of San Francisco or new islands off the coast of Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and Pacific nations, which had a limited effect, there was still only so much room. What was more, despite the major introduction of renewable energy sources, the last of the oil and coal that was still needed for only small but important jobs such as using it as rocket fuel when solar or kinetic energy was unavailable or insufficient, was coming to It's end and so to fix both of these problems, the major world powers began a set of conferences in 2044, the BnL corporation was signed between America and Russia, both of who immediately began setting to work on the future colonization of nearby planets, putting the space programmes they had on hold. Fifteen years later, the new League of Europe starting nations of the UK, France and Germany signed the conference

pact and joined the BnL League. Shortly after that China, India, Japan, Brazil and Israel joined, making the entire BnL League ten strong.

Then finally, in February 2075, when the world's population was at around 15.6 billion, the first colonization ships left for the moon with twelve million inhabitants and quickly established the first settlements there, also building a large solar atmospheric and artificial gravity generator that emanated a breathable atmosphere for a large amount of time and allowed the people on the planet to venture outside and see the wonders of space up close rather than from a screen or behind a window or dome. What was also beneficial for Humanity was that more and more countries had joined the BnL league, consisting mostly of almost all of North America, all of Europe, large parts of Asia and several countries from Africa and South America, further uniting Humanity under one banner.

Still, though, despite many moving to the planet, there was still a growing population on Earth, notably as it had been in the poorer or densely populated regions such as Africa, parts of North and South America, the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia. This was to grow to about 20 billion by the time of the start of the 22nd century and so plans were made to begin colonizing Mars and continue expanding the settlements on the Moon so the 17 million population of Humans could grow even more. The colonization of Mars was finished the same year and the sister planet of Earth became the home for eight million more Humans and it would continue to grow over the years.

However, it was also during these years that Humanity was dealt a devastating blow. In 2107, Shelby Forthright, aged 95, died of natural causes. Billions mourned his passing, knowing that he had done so much for Humanity in helping them rebuild, though this unnerved some governments and people across the world because he had been the head of BnL and so he was, alongside the world leaders, probably the most powerful man on the planet, but with his passing, there was question now not only to who would succeed him but to also what the future would hold for them.

It was something that they wished they had not asked.

As the decades rolled by and the Human population continued to grow, Humanity's oldest practice was beginning to resurface once more. Many were actually shocked when it began to happen as they believed that with BnL, the Human race was finally united forever, but Humanity's practice of war and destruction had merely hidden itself, gone dormant, waiting for when it would rise up again like some villainous cult or leader seeking to exact revenge on those against him/them.

As Humanity's population rose again, hitting an eye-popping 26.5 billion by 2150, living space on Earth, even with newly invented terraforming, was running out, so nomadic cities built on huge platforms ranging from a few hundred metres to several miles in size were constructed and placed on the seas. It was these, however, that were to begin to cause the problems for after the death of Shelby, the governmental factions that had been in the BnL League council began to fracture and break apart from each other, leading to tensions and disputes between them. With the introduction of these new cities, having been built by single countries rather than countries working together, and setting them in the seas, nations

that held overseas territory or coastal boundaries began to grow aggressive and resistant towards them, eventually leading to the arms race of nations, almost, effectively, starting what 26th century historians nicknamed the 'Second Cold War' and arising the very same fear of another global war that the first Cold War just two hundred odd years earlier had started. It was among this that the populations of Mars and the Moon began to grow with people fleeing the planet, hoping that the colonies would provide sanctuary from any fighting that might break out on Earth. Alas, though, even these colonies were not safe. Among here, more disputes began to break out between groups, each blaming the other for their leader's on Earth's actions. As a result, the BnL UN armies began to construct military space stations over the planets, easing the tension slightly but not removing it.

But the problem did not stop there. Fifty years later in 2200, the tension on Earth had ceased and many of the refugees began to return home, but it estimated here, during a short lull in the returning of refugees from the colonies, that there were now 32 billion Humans on Earth, not including the population of the present colonies (to which there would be about 32.4 billion Humans altogether out of the species). It was too much for the Earth to handle, even with the use of underwater cities and the creation of habitable zones on parts of Earth that had once been inhospitable to Man. BnL, therefore, had decided to take the initiative once again by convincing, though this time with more reluctance, that the world leaders had to work together again, just as they had done under Shelby, to solve this problem quickly and prevent any global collapse from breaking out from overpopulation.

And so, this was done in the first twenty five years of the 23rd century. Whilst the construction of space and military research facilities were built on Phobos and Deimos, the moons of Mars, colonization and terraforming ships were sent out to the planets further out into the solar system, changing the surface of planets such as Carme and Rhea, making them suitable for colonization, as well as moving some of the population to several orbital space stations. This did create a huge so called 'Peace era', when there was a decrease in disputes on Earth, and hundreds of millions quickly flocked to these new territories, finally easing Earth greatly of the swelling Human population for the first time, lowering it to about 22.5 billion by the end of the major emigration to these new zones of colonization.

But, and there was always a 'but', it could not last, and this time it did not for much longer than it had before.

During the first months of 2212, whilst BnL were busy with the construction of settlements on the newly terra-formed planet Io, several terrorist organisations, extremely reluctant of the domination BnL had over the politics, as well as the society, of the world began to spring up on Earth. What was more, some BnL nations that were still ridden with some cases of corruption and violence towards their people, were supportive of these terrorist groups and the more powerful BnL countries decided to seize the opportunity to lead a coalition against these nations that they called 'aggressive' and 'tyrannical', reminiscing the way in which powerful countries of the 21st century had been using the UN for their own ambitions. Quickly tensions began to rise all over the Earth as well as on the colonies over this act, but this was just the first of a

series.

Although the fighting was quick on Earth, several of the top leaders being hunted by the leading BnL nations quickly fled into space and to the colonies. As usual, the BnL armies gave chase and the millions of people that had left Earth for the colonies quickly began to flee back to their home planet, knowing that the war was likely to ravage the newly colonized worlds, swelling the planets population to an unprecedented 36.3 billion (almost the entire Human population, which was about 36.8 billion at this time). This time it was far too much for Earth to take and so many people had to be sent back into space, mostly to the moon, Mars or to Phobos and Deimos. Some even went to the BnL military orbital defence platforms hovering over the Earth, where they would all wait, along with the other evacuees, for another five years until 2217 when the last of the terrorist leaders had been hunted down and killed, finally allowing the many billions to leave for their home planets again, but this was not to be the last time for Humanity to begin fighting each other once again.

For the next thirty years or so, as the bustling cities on the moon and Mars began to expand to contend with the rapid growing population, tensions still rose on Earth between the countries there. Corruption and economic collapse in some parts of the world was to bring social instability to the people of those parts of the Earth. Eventually, the threat of war was to resurface again when in 2275, as the Human population of Earth had increased through refugees once more, an asteroid mining scuffle erupted between the leaders of Mars and the coalition planets of Io and Carme. BnL had stepped in once more to prevent fighting from breaking out, but this time it was absolutely hopeless and a full blown conflict erupted between the two sides that was to last for four years, leaving an estimated 45 million dead or missing and an untold number of millions more wounded and scarred before a truce was signed in 2279. After that, BnL took control of all military forces on the colonies, hoping that this would prevent any more conflicts from arising and the people of these planets were returned to them to begin rebuilding their shattered lives, but the fear of another war breaking out lingered in the minds of everyone and there was no telling when the next one would be.

Then, in the early parts of 2299, a second solar system was discovered far beyond Pluto. What was more; it had many planets within it, several that were habitable. Almost as soon as it was discovered, the plans to begin moving billions to this new solar system were put into place and they were started the following year, the start of the so called 'Colonization Age/Era' that 26th century historians liked to name it as. Within a matter of about sixty years, many major planets had been colonized in this solar system that was given the name Niobe Aino, notable among them was the 'Second Earth' known as Takra because of It's mostly Earth-like appearance even though it was just under twice the size of Jupiter, but it had been given a breathable atmosphere and a global artificial gravitational pull so as not to affect the other planets in the solar system as well as the people on Takra.

Within about two hundred years of the starting of the colonization of the Niobe Aino system, almost every planet here had been colonized. It was in 2515 when the newly named UNSC, given the name by the head of BnL to be a United Nations Space Army, claimed ownership over the planet of Reach, one that was to become the central hub of the UNSC

in the Niobe Aino system and the second out of all the other colonized planets, being only just behind the Earth. This UNSC was quickly set on the right path to bringing stability to all the worlds and setting out great plans to build mighty fleets of military spaceships. It was the height of 'Humanity's United Golden Age', or HUGA period as it was referred to in the later parts of the 26th century after the war, which coincided with the Colonization period.

However, there was always one question that Humanity had been fascinated/fearful/sceptical about since they first went into space in 1957 many centuries ago. Was Humanity alone? Ever since this theory arose in the 1950s after the end of the Second World War and during the rise of the Cold War, they had always been searching the stars for answers, but had found nothing at all. Then when the Colonization of other planets began to occur, scientists hoped that life would be discovered on other planets, but it was not so. The moon and Mars were both empty, asteroids were also scarce of any life, even the ice planet Europa when the thick ice that covered the planet's surface was broken and the huge water world that was believed to be under it was discovered, there was absolutely nothing within it. So the search was given up in the home solar system of Humanity and began again in the Niobe Aino system, but even there nothing turned up. Every planet was scoured and searched, but nothing was found by the time the search began to grind to a halt in the first two years of the 2550s. It looked like nothing was out there, but still some scientists never gave up trying and really wished that one day they would come into contact with a different species out there among the galaxy.

Unfortunately, they always say that wishing would have severe consequences for you and those around you and in the first few days of March 2551, that wish came true, only in the way that Humanity feared and hoped would never happen.

What they came into contact with was actually a coalition of alien races made of what was better known as Grunts, Jackals, Elites, Drones, Hunters, Brutes and led by a race of Prophets, notably the top three called Mercy, Regret and the leader Truth. These prophets had believed Humanity to be an affront to their gods, known better as Forerunners, even though Humanity were actually linked to the Forerunners themselves, and launched a holy war against them. For the next year, Humanity was thrown into an intergalactic conflict that killed billions and left the Niobe Aino solar system almost completely destroyed, Reach being the only planet left to stand in the path of the Covenant.

These defeats were a great shock for Humanity for they had been expected to win. After all, they had the advantage of fighting on home territory and just the very belief that despite the Covenant being advanced, they could triumph over them, but it was not to be. It was not going to be like in the films that had been made over the centuries with the extra-terrestrials coming down, destroying everything and everyone and pushing Humanity to the brink of extinction or defeat and then some last minute discovery or hero would come and save the Earth from annihilation, no. This time, Humanity really did look like they would lose for if Reach fell then the discovery of Humanity's home solar system, meaning the discovery of Earth, would be next and even though Humanity would be on familiar territory if that was to happen, the losses they had sustained were



tremendous and any hope to win the war would be gone.

Then, the use of the Dorvask material, mined on several planets colonized by Humanity, and morphing it into bodysuits with shields allowed Humanity to create a special taskforce of soldiers to enable them to fight the Covenant and, hopefully, turn the tide of the war. However, two days before the mission was to begin, the Covenant attacked Reach and slaughtered the taskforce, leaving only one woman member of the taskforce, by the name of Evelyn Knight, or Eve for short, alive and straggling on the UNSC ship, the Axiom, as it attempted to lure the Covenant fleet away from Earth.

What happened next was to really turn the tide of the war over the next few weeks. Evelyn Knight and those on board the ship discovered a ring world called Halo with the power to destroy all life in the galaxy. It was also here that they would discover the dark and deadly purpose of Halo and how it came into being. It was this adventure that began here which would lead her and many others all the way from Halo to Earth and then back to a second Halo and then to Earth once more and then the Ark outside the Milky Way where the war finally came to an end, though it very nearly destroyed Humanity completely and sent them careering wildly on trying to survive.

The Covenant, meanwhile, had been going through their major dangers at this time. The long and heavy rivalry between the Elites and the Brutes, the two dominant races in the Covenant, finally boiled over when Regret had been killed on Delta Halo by Eve, resulting in the changing of the prophets guard from the Elites to the Brutes and the initiation of Truths' long devised plan to eradicate the Elites from the Covenant and replace the entire coalition under the leadership of the Brutes. In turn, the Elites defected to the Humans, having finally realised the danger their prophets had been leading them into, and aided Eve and the UNSC in finally defeating Truth and then destroying the threat from the feared parasitic race that the Halo array had been made to keep isolated from the rest of the universe.

Eventually, in April 2552, Eve returned home with the other survivors and said her farewell to the Elites and a special friend of hers called Wally, or 343 Guilty Spark as he was normally known as he had been the monitor of the first Halo that Eve had landed on before she destroyed it. He had to depart to aid in battling the Brutes on the Elites' home world of Sanghelios, leaving Eve behind to amend herself in adapting to this new world, hoping for a better future.

But, it was not that simple. Bloodshed had been spilled greatly over the past year in the war with the Covenant, resulting in a death toll of somewhere between 55-63 billion Humans, leaving about 4.2 billion left on Earth and the few surviving outposts in the home system of the Human race, but it was not to end there. In the months following the end of the war, several disputes had broken out across Earth over the cause in which society was struggling to pull itself back together. It was only under the leadership of President Samuel Johnson, the head of BnL at the time, who kept Humanity together and enabled it to gradually begin working back to recovery.

However, in 2554, to the shock of the entire world, Samuel died of severe cancer, thus ending the revival of BnL after the end of the war but also bringing a halt to the very reconstruction of society. In fact, what was to happen next following his death over the years

was to destroy it further. Violence erupted onto the streets of many of the major cities of the world, many of which were badly destroyed in the war with the Covenant when they attacked Earth, forcing the UNSC to now be used as a global police force once more, but not long after this violence began to spread, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Zionist Front and the Christian fundamentalists, all claiming to have religious word from God as they had all done before, all groups thought to have died out centuries before, now suddenly re-emerged and launched a war of attrition against one another and the societies of their enemies, leaving fear struck into the hearts of even the most heavily protected nations once more as it had done centuries earlier.

What was more, as the years slowly rolled past, the UNSC, once united fully under the banner of Humanity in the war against the Covenant, was now beginning to split. The ODST's once the shock troopers and the toughest the UNSC could offer behind the special taskforce now became more of a secret police and an elite private army for different leaders or groups around the world. The regular army of the UNSC either disbanded or broke apart into several factions, some hoping to bring an end to the chaos on Earth, others to, or sometimes brainwashed to, bring their own ends and needs onto Humanity. As a result, almost certain civil war had broken out in some areas. Even the few remaining orbital space platforms the UNSC had built and so valiantly defended during the war were now feared by people on the ground for in case they were to be used, something that was unlikely, but always useful to spread a rumour about when need be.

That was the sad thing about Humanity in the beginning of the second half of the 26th century. As usual with the Human race, it had arisen out of the period of war and suffering, only to descend back into the darkness of the abyss once more like the species they had been for so long since they could first walk over many thousands of years ago.

As for the surviving veterans of the war, very few wished to get involved in these events circulating on Earth now, uncaring of what would happen, and, impossible as it may seem, Eve was one of them.

## 2. Evelyn Knight's current state

**\*\*New Mombassa II, Kenya\*\***

On this normal African day, the sun was shining brightly in the mostly clear blue sky, lighting up the surface of the Earth that was below it. There was a minor cooling breeze in the air, but what with the humidity about as well, it was not going to do much good for anyone who happened to be here on a holiday. Then again, why would anyone be here on a holiday now? What with Earth now mostly being under a militaristic rule, nations and small factions fighting one another for supremacy over others, ultimately leading to war and death and destruction once more across the globe, no one really wanted to go on a trip now. In fact, it was dangerous to do so because you were never sure if where you went you would be safe. The Earth today was literally living up to the usual meaning "It's a dangerous world out there," that had been uttered so many times by many, and how right they were.

In some parts of the world, though, it was admittedly peaceful. One of these places was New Mombassa II, a new city that was being constructed in the surviving areas of New Mombassa that had not been destroyed and dug up by the Covenant. It was tiny though, the entire being only about one-twentieth of the size of the first New Mombassa and having only a few hundred thousand people living there, absolutely tiny compared to the population that had been living in the region half a decade ago. However, the city did have many reminders of what the original used to look like.

The middle island that had once housed the downtown city area of New Mombassa was mostly a huge park with the remains of the bottom of the sky elevator still standing in the middle of the island. Lush trees from all over the world grew on that island, most of them having been planted there as a sign of respect to the fallen of the city who had died fighting valiantly to protect it from the Covenant even when it was hopeless. The remains of the sky elevator, therefore, stood as a monument to their sacrifice as well as to the city when it was destroyed.

Another reminder of the war here in this part of the world, and notably the best out of the entire world, was the enormous ever-stretching metallic surface of the closed Forerunner portal that had lied buried under New Mombassa for untold millennia until the Covenant dug it up, in doing so destroying New Mombassa and the lake that was next to it. It was here that the Covenant were driven off Earth, that the alliance between the Elites and Humanity was made and, on the barren hill near the monumental ruins of Voi, where the memorial to the UNSC forces as a whole who had died in the war was standing.

All those living here continually saw this every day and it reminded them of the great cost in both the Covenant and Human life here in fighting each other and then the parasitic race called the Flood, who had arrived unexpectedly into the battle via an infected Covenant CCS battle cruiser and had narrowly been destroyed by the Elites, saving Earth and the Human race.

Now, though, it looked like all that sacrifice had been in vain because these men and women had fought so Humanity could become a united race and defeat this enemy and then hope to rebuild afterwards, but no. Humanity had descended back into the abyss of waging war and suffering upon itself, but then again, Human nature had always been deceived in this way and even when Humanity had been brought to the very near brink of annihilation, still they were unwilling to unite fully under one banner. In fact, even the UNSC presence here was divided with commanders squabbling between themselves over territory and what their motives for this area should be, though law and order was high here, one of the few areas of relative safety in this part of Africa.

Maybe one of the reasons because someone well known was living here, but rather than living in the spot life, it was a shadowy existence, but it was one that person wanted.

**\*\*Spartan medical clinic and mental home\*\***

In the many halls of the medical clinic, which was a large square shaped building with two rectangular wings coming off the sides and a large circular section at the back of the main square section of the

building, on the outskirts of the city, next to a small field with a lake that was next to the mental home, that had once been a warehouse before being converted into a clinic, it was moderately busy. Doctors were walking to and from rooms, sometimes patients following them, nurses were busy at work behind desks or in small rooms, waiting rooms were full of those waiting to be seen, with some leaving and others entering every few tens of minutes.

Standing near one the entrance doors to the clinic was an elderly man, about in his sixties, dressed in a grey UNSC captain's uniform. In one hand he held a small bouquet of flowers, in the other a small data-cord. It was Lord Hood. He was leaning against the wall at the moment with his arms crossed over his chest and tapping his black shoes on the floor, waiting patiently for the nurse who had gone to the mental home across the field to come back and take him there.

He had aged more since the end of the war, but not by a few years, he looked to have aged about ten, or even fifteen! His hair was more greyer than it had been, faint, but visible dark rings circled his eyes from the lack of sleep and overwork, which was noticeable by the fact that every few moments, he would nod off for a second and then suddenly re-awaken. This was the result of stress that had been brought on the squabbling in the area for the past three years, and this was directly between the UNSC factions here, all of which had many youngsters who had, as had been done many times through history in the past, been brainwashed into believing they were the right and those who were not with them were the wrong. At the very centre of these factions was a central UNSC Council HQ that was expected to do something about this. Rather, though, they were just a group of corrupt pigs who spent more time sorting out what they wanted or living a luxurious life rather than settling the disputes and the problems of the people around them.

Hood hated being a member of their council, but at least he could thankful that he was not the only one there who hated what the highest members of the council were doing. There were about ten others, which may sound a significant amount against the only four strong Council leaders, but they could easily be kicked out of their jobs or, just like what had happened with UNSC commander in America, be assassinated. Thankfully, though, the prospect of that happening over here was moderately low so he was safe, for now.

"Mister Hood,"

Hood turned his head and found himself staring a young black nurse with short hair and dressed in a nurse's uniform with an apron tied around her waist. He straightened up and nodded.

"Yes, I'm Mister Hood," he replied. "I'm here to see Eve,"

The nurse nodded. "Come this way," and she walked past him back outside. He followed her.

The heat from the air revolved around Hood as he followed her around the building and up a small path towards a small group of rectangular buildings a few hundred feet away, but it did not seem to bother him. After being out here for the past few years even before the Covenant attack on Earth, he had grown used to it. On the other hand, that in itself did surprise him how he was able to have gotten used to the weather here in the first place, especially as he was in an area of

the world where temperatures soared and it was humid, especially at his age where any person at his age from another part of the world would not be able to stand the heat and humidity.

"How's she been?" hood asked the nurse as they approached the nearest of the rectangular buildings, which was brick made and had a kind of cream colour to the walls of it, which surround the doors and the normal sized windows lined up along the sides of the building.

"She's beenâ€|better," the nurse replied, though her uneasy tone did sound as if she was trying to lighten the way she answered Hood, which he noticed very quickly but said nothing.

She led him towards the entrance to the building, which was a door that opened automatically for them as they approached and in they went. In front of them was a small reception that was placed between two corridors, one leading straight on towards a T intersection in the building and the other left down another small corridor that had about four different room doors lined up along the right wall of the corridor. To the left of the reception was a small staircase attached to the wall.

"This way," the nurse said to Hood, leading him up the staircase, both of them nodding at the man sorting out work on a data pad behind the reception desk, who nodded in reply and continued with his work.

As they climbed, Hood quickened his pace so he was walking alongside the nurse.

"So, what exactly is wrong with Eve?" he asked her. "I could tell back there that you were unsure,"

The nurse sighed. "She's been a bitâ€|stressed lately. Her PTS pills have not had as much effect on her and the medication we have given her has made her feel a bit rough and exhausted," another sigh as they reached the second floor and walked left down the corridor, passing several doors on the left and right. "Mr Hood, it has been difficult for her. For the last four years, she has been in and out of here constantly. We've even had to restrain her at some points because of her violence,"

Hood stared at her with a shocked expression etched on his face. "Violence?" he repeated, flabbergasted.

"Yes. She has breathing fits and passes out. She had one recently, a few days ago when we brought her in. Then when she woke up, she went berserk and tried to throttle someone," the nurse explained to a wide-eyed Hood. "We had to shock her with a tazer in the end," the nurse paused and looked sadly at the door to the room at the end. "She's a very unstable person at the moment. Justâ€|just don't upset her. Please,"

Hood nodded. "I'll be careful with what I say,"

They stopped outside a tall brown door about seven feet tall with the number \*\*250 \*\*written across it. The nurse knocked lightly on the door and both stood there for a few moments, expecting a reply but nothing came.

"Evelyn?" the nurse called out, slightly confused to why she was not answering them. "You have a visitor. It's Lord Hood,"

Still no answer came.

"Are you sure she's even in there?" he asked the nurse, who nodded.

"I'm absolutely sure," she replied. "The patients don't go outside until later," she told him. "Maybe she's asleep," she suggested and knocked again and waited for a few more moments with Hood standing next to her.

Just then, there was the sound of a door unlocking from the other side of the door, drawing the two's gaze. Then, the doorknob turned and opened.

Standing there was a tall woman with silver hair that slightly went below her shoulders, blue eyes and was dressed in a white top and a pair of jeans with bare-feet. One of her hand gripped the doorknob on the inside and the other was dangling by her side, the fingers of her hand were shaking and twitching as if she was in pain. Despite this, she seemed to lighten up a little when she saw them. It was Evelyn Knight, or Eve for short.

"Hood," she croaked weakly, giving a slight cough. "It's been so long,"

He nodded. "You look well, Eve," he replied.

"I'll leave you two alone," the nurse said and walked back up the corridor.

"Well, come in," she said, stepping aside and he entered her room.

It was a large square shape with a shiny wooden floor, cream coloured walls and a white ceiling. A light bulb covered by a cylindrical lantern cover surrounded it. In one corner of the room was a round wooden table next to the door with three wooden chairs around it. In the middle of the table was a vase of dead dandelions. A small sofa sat against the wall opposite the table nearer the window and next to that was a small cabinet with several books resting on top of it and next to that was a water cooler with a water container on top of it. In another corner of the room was a bin. A second door near the right end of the room led to a bedroom that contained a bed with a bedside cabinet next to it and a wardrobe behind the door. Another window was on the left wall of that room.

As Hood stepped into the room, he noticed a box of tablets on the table. Across them were the letters PTS, and in brackets next to them the initials stood for Post-Traumatic Stress, tablets. An empty glass of water was next to them. So those were the pills Eve had been taking to help with her stress but as Hood went back to when he saw her hand just moments ago, he could tell that they were not working very well with her.

\_If they're like that, then how bad is her medication with her? \_He mentally asked himself anxiously.

"So how have you been?" she asked him as she walked away from the door and pulled up a chair for him.

"Thanks, Eve," he replied. "And I've beenâ€|well, better, but still okay,"

She pulled up a chair for herself. "Are things still hectic for you?"

Hood nodded. "Unfortunately. Nothings seems to be getting done, the politicians in the main council here as well as everywhere else are too busy with their own problems, literally with themselves, rather than with keeping order here," he sighed frustratingly. "It just seems that nothing is working at the moment, Eve. I just hope it all changes one day,"

She nodded. "So do I,"

Silence fell between the two for a moment, contemplating on what they should say. After all, Hood had not come here just to talk to her about what was going on with him.

"Oh, I've just remembered, these are for you," Hood said, holding up the flowers to her.

"Oh, thank you," Eve replied, reaching her hand out for them. It was then Hood caught it shaking quite madly in mid-air and he stared at it with a hint of concern in his eyes.

"Eve, your hand is shaking quite badly," he pointed out.

Her blue eyes looked at it and lowered their gaze, this time to more annoyed, or even angry.

"I know," she replied, her tone of voice suddenly going much colder and she took the flowers and just dumped them into the vase of dead dandelions. Hood was a little concerned about her doing that, especially with the way she replied to him.

"Why don't you take some of your pills?" he asked her.

"I did a few minutes ago, just before you arrived," she told him. "And, no doubt, as you've seen, they don't work very well. I'mâ€|" she trailed off, her blue eyes looking down at the floor for a moment, her voice box refusing to utter the words that had to follow. "I'm too shaken, too depressed and affected,"

"Do the nurses know about this?"

"Yeah, but there's not really a lot they can do about it," Suddenly, she looked back up at him with a slightly darker gaze. "No doubt you've heard, not a lot is being done for us here!"

Hood was a little taken aback by this. She was sounding like it was his fault. Then again, she was mentally affected by her past and, as with many veterans, it was common for this, but the way her life had been going since the end of the war, it had really surprised him.

For the first year after the war ended, Eve had returned home to Washington DC and lived there in her mother's old house. She was perfectly fine and normal and was coping quite well. Then again, everyone was. But then about two years after the war ended, not long after BnL president Samuel Jackson had died of cancer, society all over the world broke down and everyone from all walks of life, poor or rich, young or old, developed or un-developed, was affected. Eve was one of them. From what Hood had been told, she had decided to sell her mother's house and then moved out here because of the arising recession and violence in America, particularly along the East Coast where new seats of power had arisen and taken control of various parts of the country, to a place where it was much more peaceful. Since then, because she lived nearby, he had been keeping an eye on her, making sure she was okay, but even then it was difficult because barely anyone saw her. She just stayed at home, pretty much isolating herself from the world.

Alongside that was her health. Just before the war, Eve had been perfectly healthy. She was barely ill, never broken a bone or been badly injured and was always careful. Now, within just two years after the end of the war, she suddenly struggled to cope and she was beginning to become more ill, especially with her PTS where she would be fine one minute and then suddenly go berserk the next, becoming extremely violent to the point where she had to be restrained. Though Hood had not been present at any of these violent spells of hers, he had been told by those that had that it was terrifying because of her aggressiveness. What was more, not long ago, they had actually discovered something else about her health, something far more threatening.

"What about yourâ€¦ Umâ€¦?" Hood asked cautiously, knowing that she did not like it being mentioned but it was best to make sure it was okay.

Eve, sighing in frustration as she had had this asked of her many times in the past, lifted the right sleeve of her pocket to reveal her shoulder, and there right in the middle of it was a big scar with a kind of dark green/brown spot in the middle of it. That was the more threatening thing about her health Hood had been worrying about.

It had been about five years ago, literally a few hours shortly after Truth had died when Eve had gone into the Flood infested High Charity to find and rescue her A.I friend Auto. As she searched for him, numerous Flood attacked her and one of them, one of these new spiker-like creatures that fired spikes at anyone nearby, hit her with a spike. Though it had been only a moment's contact with the infected spike and her skin before Eve pulled it out, a small fragment of Flood DNA had managed to work its way inside her. They had found this out about a year ago when Eve had gone for a blood test and they had found some unusual traces of something inside it. Luckily, though, with the knowledge she had of the Flood and the DNA samples and parts they had from dead Flood, they were able to develop a vaccine for her, but not a cure to completely get rid of the infection. In a way, the vaccine was slowing the infection because it had been growing slightly in her body, kind of making Eve a literal walking, breathing non-Flood creature, probably the first ever, but whether it would eventually die on its own, remain there until she died or even if it would spread further, they did not know. All they and Eve had to do for now was just hope it would go away on its own,



or at least stay the way it was.

"Has it been bad?" Hood asked.

"No, it hasn't," Eve replied abruptly, lowering her sleeve over her shoulder. "Now, Hood, can you not mention it. I don't need people poking around about it!"

"Sorry, Eve,"

"It's okay!"

Silence fell between them again as the mood settled, but only just. Hood, though, knew it would probably fire up again in a minute because of what he had come here to ask her.

He cleared his throat. "Eve, I need to ask you something," he told her promptly.

"What is it?" she asked reluctantly, sighing with annoyance as if she knew what he was going to throw at her now.

"I know things haven't been particularly good for you in recent years, Eve," he said. "Y'know, if you really want to, you can come back to us. Back to the UNSC. We'll look after you,"

He was hoping she would at least consider his offer on whether to come back to a life where he knew she would be okay. Unfortunately, though, he got the exact opposite. In fact, Eve rather than just ignoring him or retorting why she should accept, she flipped.

"You want me to come back?" she hissed dangerously, narrowing her eyes at him, and smirked. "How about no!" she snapped. "I don't trust anyone now, Hood!"

"Eve, you're not doing well on your own. Look at you!" he exclaimed. "Your ill, your depressed and—and well, you're just not the person you used to be. You've changed!"

At this point, she really snapped and shot up out of her seat, knocking it to the floor and stepped towards the general, fury burning in her eyes like an inferno.

"What do you expect!" she whispered furiously to him, leaning in close, but he held his ground, though he did feel really scared of her. "It changes everyone, especially what I had to go through, Hood. What I saw on that last little part of the war, you wouldn't even be able to understand! People like you never do!"

"I think I do, Eve," he replied calmly, but with firmness in his tone as well. "I was involved in the war as well,"

"Not as much as I was!" she snapped at him, turning away from him. "And as for your offer to return to the UNSC, the answers no!"

"Eve, you would be looked after. I can vouch for a lot of people that they can't stand seeing you like this,"

"I don't care anymore, Hood!" she turned to face him, though her eyes held a more pleading and saddening gaze to them. "Don't you get it? I

don't want to! I don't care anymore about the UNSC!" She paused and stepped back over to the sofa and sat down on it, gazing sadly out of the window at the sun as if it was something that understood her present state of mind and body. "I just want to be on my own now! I don't want to get involved in anything else!"

Hood stood up and walked over to her, resting his hand on her shoulder and knelt down so his face was level with hers.

"Eve, you won't be asked to fight or be used as a political shield or anything. I just want you to be safe,"

"I was!" She snapped at him, glaring back at him once more. "But if your right, then that's from you. What about the others in that council your part of? They'll do all of those things to me!" she paused for a heavy breath to try and calm herself down and looked ahead at the wall. "I'm not going anywhere, Hood. And, quite frankly, you've wasted your time coming here,"

Hood bit his lip, knowing that there was no longer going to be any point in trying to convince Eve further, but enough was enough for her. Her word was final. Still, despite knowing this, he pressed for hope again.

"So that's it then?" he asked her.

"Yes!" she huffed firmly. "I'm not coming back, and that's final from me,"

Hood sighed in defeat and stood up. "I'm sorry, Eve, for wasting your time," he said to her.

She smirked in an un-amused manner before gazing lowly back out the window. "Doesn't matter. Everyone seems to be doing that," she replied, annoyed.

Hood got up and walked back over to the door, but stopped next to the table. "It was nice seeing you again," he said, looking back over his shoulder at her. "And I brought you this as well," he added, holding up the data cord to her before placing it on the table and opening the door. "In case you need to talk to someone."

He stepped out into the corridor, closing the door behind him, and heaved a heavy sigh of frustration, rubbing his thumb and finger over his eyes and bringing them together at the top of his nose. This was so angry for him! He was trying to do the best for her and yet she was being completely ignorant! He just wanted to help her, but it seemed she wanted nothing to do with the outside world or anyone in it.

Sighing once again, Hood walked back down the corridor towards the stairs, hoping that the annoyance he had received today would leave him.

Meanwhile, Eve walked over to the bin in the corner of her room with the vase of flowers in her hands and tipped it upside down, making the flowers, both dead and alive, along with the water inside the vase, fall into the bin and she slammed it shut. As she walked back over to the table, slamming the vase back on the table, her eyes rested on the data cord left by Hood and she picked it up between her

fingers and eyed it with anger still lurking in her gaze.

\_I don't feel like talking to anyone at the moment! \_She mentally said to herself and she threw it down onto the table and turned away, ignoring the tapping sound it made as it fell to the floor under the table.

"I don't feel like talking to anyone at all," she muttered to herself as she sat down on the sofa and brought her knees up to her chest and embraced them tightly, looking outside with her heavy blue eyes.

For Eve, this was what the war all those years ago had turned her into, a shell of her former caring and friendly self. Now all she was to the world was a depressed and isolated wreck that looked like it showed no hope of changing.

### 3. Receiving a transmission

**\*\*The next day\*\***

**\*\*New Mombassa II Council Hall\*\***

The council hall of New Mombassa II was a large circular building about one hundred metres in length and width with a height of about eighty feet. The outside walls were lined with the old Ionic order columns of the Ancient Greeks and at the front of the building, which was facing the main street where a set of new skyscrapers were being constructed, were two large bronze doors that would lead into the main foyer before the council hall. On the top of the council hall was a large landing platform with the letters **\*\*LZ \*\***painted onto it.

The skyscrapers across the road were being built in the place of where an old hotel complex had once stood before it was destroyed during the war when a Covenant assault carrier had slip-space ruptured in the city and headed to Delta Halo. The council hall itself was even built on what had been a set of houses across the street from it, most having been abandoned when the population living in the city had mostly left after the war ended. What went on inside was a series of tasks from debates/arguments/discussions between different groups or factions over the city to the analysing of the defence of the area, the records of the births and deaths here and even the receiving of transmissions of any ships entering or leaving New Mombassa II via the nearby airport. It probably was the busiest part of the city, or at least one of, so far but it would be overtaken soon, though that was providing development still continued.

Within one of the transmission receiver rooms of the building, on the second floor, one of the men working on a control panel began his morning check of the frequency of the radio waves being emitted out from the cities communication system a few miles away. As he typed in the code on the keyboard on the control panel in front of him, causing a data screen to appear out of the top of the panel, revealing the lines of frequency there, the sense of boredom instantly filled his eyes. He did this virtually every morning and several of the lines were rising and falling, but they were staying within the usual level they would go, meaning it was Earth transports moving in and out from the area. Never anything new. It made him

wonder why he came here quite early every morning, but there was no way he could object as the councilmen had the power to expel people. Usually, that power was restricted to those they deemed a threat but as with all power, it was taken advantage of and used for the own ends of those who were powerful enough to use it. It was much like the old ostracism order the Ancient Greeks had once used to expel political rivals and now, once again, these same traditions had come back to haunt and lead the future again.

Heaving a heavy sigh, the worker reached under the control panel, pressed a button and a set of papers ejected out of a small paper slot on the front of the control panel. Order papers for the arrivals and departures from the airport, the same he had used every day for the last year he had been doing this job and he was going to be filling them out with the same old things he had done many times before.

As he set them out on a small clear space next to the keyboard on the control panel and reached for a pen in his pocket, the door to the room opened and Hood walked in. He was back in his old white UNSC captains uniform, still signifying his loyalty to them rather than the council, which was lucky for him that he was still here only because of the others here who wanted to help Mombassa II and the surrounding area rebuild back to what it had been and not in the way the corrupt councilmen here did.

"Hello Hood," the worker greeted, raising his hand and turning in his chair to face him.

"Hello, Sam," he replied. "Came in here to check up and see if anything new had happened," he added, though his voice sounded as if it nothing knew would have been picked up by the radio transmissions.

"No, nothing new," Sam replied lowly, he too sounding as if nothing new was to show up on the screen. "As usual," he added. A pause hung between the two for a moment as Sam looked back at the data screen, still seeing no change in the radio waves. "So how was the meeting in Crete?" he asked, hoping to change the subject onto something more exciting than work.

"Oh, it was a pain in the neck!" Hood told him, wiping his hand across his forehead as if showing the frustration to the man in front of him. "They continued to build outside the authorization of the head UNSC council there in Greece and, what's more, there's threatening to be a split in Europe between different factions there," he sighed frustratingly and wiped his forehead with his hand again. "Everything's getting out of hand," he told Sam. "There just seems to be no method of peace anywhere at the moment,"

Sam nodded sombrely. "I wish all this could be solved, then we could go back to how things used to be,"

"Don't we al-" \_BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!\_

The beeping sound emanating from the control panel cut Hood off mid-sentence and caused both men to look at it with both wary and surprise filling their eyes. What was going on?

Sam turned his body back to face the control panel and pressed a

small button on the end of the keyboard to establish contact with the craft. A tiny microphone rose up out of a slot next to the button and stopped just in front of Sam's lips. Hood leaned in close eagerly, wanting to hear who this craft belonged to.

"This is New Mombassa II council communications system. Your craft has been picked up entering monitored airspace. Identify yourself, over," Sam said into the microphone.

All that came back in reply was the faint hissing sound that was static. No response from the craft. Concern began to fill the two men as the frequency of the radio waves on the data screen rose quickly, meaning the craft was coming closer.

"Unidentified craft, you have been warned. Identify yourself now or you will be shot down!" Sam said in a further tone.

Static came back in reply once again. The level of concern in Hood grew further and he pressed a second button on the other end of the keyboard of the control panel. The data screen holding the radio wave frequency shrunk slightly and a holographic satellite map of New Mombassa II appeared on the screen, displaying the entire city as it was sprawled out across the African plain. A large red dot appeared in the sky to the east over the sea that led out to the Indian Ocean, and it was getting closer to the city. Hood pressed a third button to zoom in but across the screen flashed the words in red: **\*\*Unable to zoom in\*\***, which made him further suspicious, even worried.

"It's probably hostile," Hood said, believing it was a rival faction using a cloaking device or something to disable their communication systems. "Order some craft to shoot it down," he told Sam.

"Yes, sir!" Sam replied obligingly and set about ordering some fighters to be sent out to shoot the now very likely hostile craft down.

\_KZKâ€| "This isâ€|KZK-" (static)"This isâ€|Sanghelios tran-KZK"\_

Both men froze and their eyes turned to face the voice coming out of the microphone. For a moment, they were hesitant to even move as if afraid the thing would suddenly blow up or that the voice would send an order to kill them or something. Then, gingerly, Hood stepped forward and moved his mouth near to the microphone, sweat beginning to form on his forehead.

"This is-" he began, but stopped to clear his throat. "This is Commander Hood of the New Mombassa II UNSC. Unidentified craft identify yourself, now!" he said sternly into the microphone.

Static followed for a moment before the voice he and Sam had just heard began to push its way through once again.

"\_This isâ€|Sanghelios transport-KZK" (static) "-ort 061. This is shipmaster Vad-" \_the voice was cut off again.

"Is it dangerous, sir?" Sam asked anxiously, looking up at Hood, who remained frozen in place as if he was in a trance, his blue eyes fixed on the microphone as if it was holding some kind of magical power over him. "Sir?" Sam repeated, nudging him.

"Oh!" Hood shook his head and blinked several times. "Sorry, Sam, It's just thatâ€¦I feel like I know that voice, like I've heard it somewhere before,"

"Where, sir?"

\_KZKâ€¦ "This is shipmaster Vadumee speaking here," \_the voice they were trying to talk to was coming out more clearly now through the microphone now. \_"We have received your transmission. Identify the one contacting us, over,"\_

Hood's mind went blank with shock. He was right, he had heard that voice beforeâ€¦butâ€¦but it had been a long time ago, a \_really\_long time ago. Never did he think he would be hearing it now, and for a moment he was hesitant to reply as if he believed he was dreaming the whole thing. Then, after a moment, he leant forward and began to speak once more.

"Shipmaster Vadumee," he said in a normal voice, but with a tone that sounded as if he was greeting an old friend.

\_"Who is this contacting us?" \_the voice asked.

"It's Commander Hood of the New Mombassa II UNSC, formerly Lord Hood of the UNSC during the Human-Covenant War," he replied.

Silence fell, broken only by the faint breathing from Hood and Sam, joint by the static emanating from the microphone. For a moment, Sam believed that the person speaking on the other end had suddenly been cut off, but then the voice reappeared, though this time it held not a firm tone, but a much softer and shocked way of voice.

\_"Lord Hood," \_it said breathlessly. \_"It is good for us to meet with an old friend once again,"\_

"Likewise," Hood replied. "Vadumee head for the council hall in the middle of the city and land on the landing platform there. I'll send you the co-ordinates now,"

\_"Thank you, Lord Hood. We shall meet up with you soon,"\_ and the voice disappeared and static was all that followed from the microphone.

As Hood typed in the co-ordinates of the council hall to the ship coming in, Sam leaned in towards him.

"Sir, who exactly are these people?" he asked intently.

"Elites," Hood answered simply.

4. I'm not going anywhere!

**\*\*One hour later\*\***

**\*\*Underground location, outside New Mombassa II\*\***

Walking down the corridor of one of the underground locations used by the UNSC during the war was Hood. Next to him was a tall creature

that was about 8ft 6 with silver armour covering his head, torso, legs, arms, hands and feet, a well-built body with light black/dark grey skin underneath and a mouth that was made up of mandibles, two on one side and the stump remains of what had been two on the other before he lost them. This creature was known as a Sangheili, or an Elite as the Humans nicknamed them. This one was known as Rtas Vadumee, one of the shipmaster Elites who had been at war with the Humans until the Great Schism had divided the Covenant five years ago and they had decided to unite with Humanity to defeat the prophet Truth and to also stem the tide of the unstoppable Flood. Both had succeeded in doing that and then the Elites went home. For a long time, they did not hear from each other. No contact, messages or anything. In fact, today was the first time the Elites had made contact with Humanity for the first time in five years. A long time and a lot of change had passed since the end of the war and Vadumee knew he had to be wary of who he contacted because he did not know of the reaction he would receive.

Luckily, he had found out, using a data scrutinizing device on his ship, which was a green Covenant phantom parked on the ground above him, that Hood was in this area and so he landed, met up with him and then flew off to an old airbase outside of New Mombassa II so as not attract any unwanted attention from anyone that may not be overjoyed to see the Elites back on Earth. Whilst they had been travelling, Hood had called for someone to head to a small house outside New Mombassa II and pick up the person who lived there and bring her to this base, though he had a lot of fear inside him because he knew she would not be happy to go through this again.

As the two turned right into another corridor section, Hood was explaining to Vadumee about what had happened on Earth since the end of the war and his extra-terrestrial friend had been both shocked and amazed at what had taken place on the planet of his allies since the end of the fighting.

"And soâ€¦this is what Humanity has descended to. A divided, factional civilization that's pretty much back the way it used to be centuries ago," he said to his Elite friend.

"I cannot imagine that," Vadumee replied. "Things have not been very good back on our world either,"

"Are you still at war with the Brutes?"

Vadumee nodded. "Ever since the end of the Covenant, they have been assaulting our planet and have taken control of large swaths of it. They have the advantage in Forerunner technology and with the Grunts and Jackals aiding them greatly; there is little hope for us now in pushing them off any time soon,"

Hood nodded lowly. Hearing what Vadumee was telling him was hard to believe it was happening, but it was.

The whole story of the war was that shortly after the end of the fighting on Earth with the Covenant, the Elites had returned to a similar situation on their home world. As well as a shortage in population because of the war, several small factions had been created and were waging war against one another for dominance over Sanghelios. Alongside that, there was the threat from the remaining Covenant loyalists, who were now being led by several Brute

chieftains against the so called 'heretics' of the Great Journey that Truth, Regret and Mercy had set the Covenant on so long ago. The Elites were fighting valiantly against the loyalist Covenant, but were also engaged against one another as well, making it a lot more reminiscent of when China was divided by war between nationalism and communism in the 1930s whilst being at war with the Japanese at the same time. Everything there was much the same as what was happening on Earth, though because Sangheili culture was forged into tribes and clans, they had no central force or leader to unite them, the only one ever in their entire history to have successfully united the entire race was with Truth and the Covenant and they had been foreigners to them, and so they descended a lot quicker into what Humanity was going through right now.

"Alright, we're here," Hood said after a moment's pause between them, nodding ahead to a door where the person Hood had called because Vadumee had wanted to meet that person was waiting.

Hood opened the door and Vadumee stepped in: Hood followed, closing the door behind him. The room was a small square shape with light blue walls, a grey floor and ceiling with a table in the middle of it. Three chairs were placed around it and above them on the ceiling was a large light. Sitting on the edge of the other side of the table was Eve. She was dressed in jeans again but this time had a yellow top on and was wearing slip on shoes. She looked up at the door when they entered, revealing the dark rings that were just visible around her eyes once again and the tiredness that was held within them. She had been discharged from the hospital earlier yesterday afternoon and had gone home, but when she had been called about this meeting, she was less than happy to oblige.

Though, seeing Vadumee did surprise her, but she was probably not as surprised as he was when he saw her.

"Evelyn," he said, holding up his hand to her. She got up; a little shock lingering in her blue eyes as if unable to believe that he was here in front of her, and shook it. "It's good to see you again,"

"Y-you too, Vadumee," she replied, her voice slightly hoarse as if she was struggling to speak. She coughed. "Sorry, Iâ€¦I haven't been feeling all that well lately,"

"Hood told me," the Elite said sympathetically.

Eve looked at him disapprovingly. "Oh did he?" she asked sarcastically. "Well there's a surprise,"

"I'm sorry about this, Eve," he replied. "Vadumee just showed up all of a sudden and he wanted to see you. He said he had to talk to you,"

She looked at him questionably, but he could see the unimpressed look in her features. A tense pause filled the air around them. Vadumee and Hood did not know what to say to her; both worried that she would not listen to them, before Hood cleared his throat, breaking the silence.

"Well, let's at least sit down," he offered, pulling up his seat, Vadumee doing the same. Eve sighed in annoyance and pulled up her



chair, sitting down and crossing her arms on the table, staring at them, waiting to hear what they would throw at her this time.

"So what is it you want to see me about?" she asked Vadumee un-approvingly.

Vadumee coughed. "Wellâ€¦ Evelyn," he began, struggling on how to word this correctly so as not to confuse, or worse offend her. "I'm sure you remember about the war raging on our home world?" he asked her.

At once, she knew what he meant. "Let me guess. You want me to come to your world and help you fight the Brutes, is that it?" she said expectantly. Vadumee and Hood were taken aback by her sharp reply but he nodded and Eve glared at Hood. "Hood, I thought I told you I'm not going anywhere!" she snapped at him.

"Eve, this wasn't my idea!" he pointed out firmly. "Vadumee just showed up all of a sudden. Butâ€¦ to be fair to him, Eve, he hasn't come here of his own will,"

"That is true, Evelyn," Vadumee took over, drawing her gaze once again. "But it is not just me who has come here to ask for your help,"

"Well, whoever else wants it isn't going to get it!" she snapped, getting up from her seat and half-turning away from them, crossing her arms over her stomach. "I don't want anything else to do with any war,"

"Evelyn, please!" Vadumee begged her, getting up from his seat. "The Arbiter has requested for your help. Besides, he is your friend. He helped you and I, and I think I can vouch for him as well, think it is fair if you return the favour,"

A pause hung in the air between them once again. Hood, who was still sitting down, eyed the two nervously, worried that something was going to suddenly happen. Nothing did, apart from Eve looking back at Vadumee with a low gaze and sighing deeply.

"I'm sorry, Vadumee," she said calmly. "But I'm not going anywhere. I already told Hood that I'm not going to get involved in anymore fighting, anymore political factions or anything that has nothing to do to me! Understand?!" she said the last word in a calm, but firm tone.

Vadumee gritted his mandibles, or his two full ones, together tightly, showing that he was annoyed with her decision. To her, this was something she did not and was not going to get involved in at all by no means, but to him it as an outrageous conclusion! The Elites, the Arbiter in particular, had helped her and her people in the war so they at least deserved some help from the Humans, even if it was just Eve, in return. Then again, the Arbiter had asked if Eve alone did come back to help because of something urgent he needed her for, though what it was Vadumee did not know because the Arbiter had not told him in case, as his comrade put it, that the Brutes somehow found out about it.

After a few moments' silence, Hood got up. "Eve, try and at least thinkâ€¦" he began, but Vadumee raised his hand, stopping him

mid-sentence.

"No, don't bother," he told him. "Well," he sighed. "I'm sorry about this Evelyn, but I will say this: it has surprised me that you refuse to help your friends in their time of need. I thought I knew you,"

"Not anymore!" she snapped at him, glaring deeply at his face.

Vadumee just shook his head. "I shall take my leave," he said to Hood, who nodded and opened the door for him, but he paused in the doorway and looked over his shoulder back at Eve. "I shall relay your decision to the Arbiter, Evelyn," he told her. "I doubt he will be pleased with it,"

"Well he'll have to live with it, won't he," she huffed in annoyance, turning her head away from him.

With another sigh and a shake of the head, he left the room, walking back out into the corridor. Hood watched him go from the doorway and looked back at Eve.

"You shouldn't have been that hard, Eve," he said to her. She ignored him and turned her back to him. He sighed. "I'll let you show yourself out," he said and walked out of the room after Vadumee to see him off.

When he disappeared, Eve looked back at the door, though this time a sad look was spread across her face and she sighed, looking down at the ground with guilt reigning inside her. Even though she had made it clear that she had had enough of getting involved in war, she did feel guilty about rejecting a call for help from her friend. That was something she hated doing, especially since what had happened to her in the war—literally just after she became that super soldier and helped save Humanity and the Elites from total destruction. It just—it just looked as though she really was turning her back on the world and her friends now, no matter what was wrong with them.

It really did look as if she was leaving them to her fate and, with a heavy sigh of regret; she left the room to go home, trying to take her mind off what had just happened now.

## 5. Another collapsing fit

**\*\*Later that day\*\***

A few miles on the outskirts of New Mombassa II, a small SUV-like car drove up along the dirt path that led from the city and up into the hills near the now refilled, but shallower, lake where the Forerunner portal was. High in the sky, the sun was beginning its descent behind the distant hills to the west whilst to the east, the dark sky that was the night was gradually creeping in.

The car came to a halt next to a small brick house that had a thin, wooden fence covering a kind of half rectangular shape of the grass in front of it, meaning it was the front garden. A metal roof was placed on top of the bricks and a wooden framed door was the

building's entrance. Around the back was a small garden with a few flowers and bushes growing and nearby was an apple tree. The car door swung open and Eve stepped out.

"Thanks, Samuel," she said to the man, who was black and about the same height as her, had black haired, green eyes and an athletic body. He had been a former militia man and had fought at Athi village after a small group of Covenant had been detected heading to Nairobi.

"It's okay, Eve," he replied, his accent quite thick but she was able to understand him. "Are you feeling better now?" he asked her.

She nodded. On the way back, she had felt a bit queasy and had a sharp pain emanating from her scar so she tried to sleep it off as they were going through the outskirts of the city. When she had woken up about ten minutes ago it had mostly gone off, but was still hurting a little and now she was getting a bit of a migraine so she would have to have a look inside and see if she had anything for it.

"Alright, I'll see you later, Samuel," she said to him.

"Bye, Eve," he replied. "Look after yourself,"

"You too," she closed the door and walked back to her house as Samuel turned the car around and drove back down the dirt path in the direction of New Mombassa II.

Eve walked up to her front door and grabbed one of the bricks that stuck out slightly from the wall and pushed it aside, revealing a small hole that Eve put her hand in and pulled out a small key. She pushed the brick back into its original place and unlocked the door and walked in, shutting it behind her.

Her front room was a small square shape with a sofa along the wall opposite her and a table in front of it. The walls and ceiling were a cream colour and the floor was bare wooden floorboards. Another door on the right wall of the room led into her bedroom whilst a third door on the wall opposite her led to the kitchen which had a fourth door on the right wall in there that led to the bathroom. Next to the sofa was a small cabinet which held a lamp and a few books and a data cord on top of them. On another larger cabinet against the wall opposite the sofa was a small television with two candles placed in front of it. A shoe rack was on the floor next to the front door and Eve took off her shoes and dumped them on there and walked over to the sofa and sat down, exhaling deeply as she plonked herself down.

The last meeting she had had with Vadumee and Hood about two hours ago now replayed itself over and over in her head constantly. Somewhere in her mind, she was beginning to have some regret for her decision. After all, when Vadumee had told her that it was not him that had come to Earth to request her help, she had to admit that she was surprised, but at the time she had been so taken aback and annoyed by Vadumee's attempt to try and bring her back into their war that she was just too blind to see through it and realise that she was being asked for help by a friend.

Though, on the other hand, she had made it completely clear that she

did not want to get involved in any kind of conflict no matter what it was or where it was because she feared that if she got to know anyone, then they would be killed, just like what had happened to her on Reach whenâ€¦ No, she did not want to think of that right now, or even at all. That probably explained why she got rid of the old scrapbook that her friend Rachel had made years ago before she died on Reach. It was just too painful to remember them, but she knew that in doing what she was now she would be repeating it all over again and so right now she just wanted to be alone and away from everyone else.

Well, from almost everyone else.

The data cord on the top of the books on the cabinet next to her caught her attention as if she realised it was there in the first place and she picked it up between her thumb and finger. Hood had given it to her yesterday when he visited her in the care home and she had thrown it on the floor, but when she was discharged she saw it under the table as she was putting on her shoes and picked it up and brought it home. Maybeâ€¦ maybe she did not really want to be completely isolated from everyone else.

"Could he still be in there, though?" Eve muttered to herself, glancing at her shoulder for a moment, remembering how she had used it last time.

"Yes, I'm still here,"

A tiny purple figure of about six to seven inches tall suddenly shot up out of the data cord in her hand. He was wearing a UNSC high ranking's officer uniform. The exposed parts of his body, head, neck and hands, were see through. The man also had some weird purple/light blue lines flowing up his body. They seemed to form from his feet, where they would flow up his body and then disappear into his head. Eve was startled at first, which was noticeable by her gasp and a little jump in her seat but she quickly replaced her surprised look with a smile at the man, who smiled back.

"Very funny scaring me, Auto," she replied.

He shrugged, but still held the smile on his face. "Well,"

Eve chuckled slightly and rested the data cord on her shoulder. Then, to her amazement, he just stepped off it and sat down on her shoulder next to the data cord.

"Never seen you do that before," Eve remarked, impressed.

Auto nodded. "They upgraded the data cord so I don't really need it to get to and from a different computer source. I can just walk it,"

Eve smiled at him. This A.I intelligent unit was probably one of the only friends she had left from the war that was still here on Earth. She remembered very well when she first met him, which had been back on the Covenant CCS battle cruiser \_Truth and Reconciliation \_when they were on the first Halo ring saving Captain McCrea. That was a long time ago now, only five years but it just felt like an entire eternity had passed for her since then.

It was also just before something really life changing for her happened on the ring. That had been when she met someone there: a Human who was a monitor of the Halo ring called 343 Guilty Spark, or Wally as he was really called, and her meeting him had really changed her life because he had protected her, virtually guided her, the Elites and Humanity through the Halo rings and the Ark, a huge Forerunner structure located outside the Milky Way galaxy that actually created the Halo rings, and saved her, thus helping in save Humanity and possibly all life in the entire galaxy.

"So how's it been?" Auto asked her, snapping her back into reality.

"Oh, It'sâ€|been fine," she replied hesitantly, though she tried to sound like she was okay but Auto was not fooled.

"Really? Because I heard everything between you and Hood and plus he's told me about how you've been with your health since you came out here,"

"Auto, I'm fine, okay," Eve folded her arms, annoyance seeping into her like water seeping through a crack in a wall. "Look, I appreciate you and Hood are worried for me, but I'm fine. Really, I am,"

Auto gave her an unconvinced look. He was not going to be fooled this easily by Eve. He practically knew her better than anyone else. All that time he had been spent in her head when his data cord was placed inside her bodysuit made him see how she thought and how her mind worked, how her emotions were and what she was thinking at any time.

Auto sighed. "Eve, you can tell me anything," he said to her. "I won't tell anyone else, I promise. What's bothering you?"

"Auto, nothing is bothering me!" she snapped angrily at him, though he was not taken aback by it, having been used to her attitude as he heard it a lot back in the war. "Ow!" a look of pain etched across her face and she placed a hand on her forehead. "Great, now my migraine is coming back!" she hissed angrily to herself.

"Why don't you take some painkillers?" Auto advised her.

"They won't he-Argh!" she grabbed her shoulder tightly with her hand and gritted her teeth in pain. That throbbing pain she had felt from her scar earlier on was back, only this time it was much more painful, and it seemed to be getting worse.

"Eve, are you alright?" Auto asked worryingly.

She tried to reply, but another sharp flare from her shoulder stopped her and all that came out of her was an almost faint cry of pain as she collapsed onto the floor on her side with the painful shoulder and began to hyperventilate.

"Eve!" Auto exclaimed worryingly, jumping off her shoulder and rushing to her face, seeing her eyes flickering as if they were trying desperately not to close and give into this fit. "Eve, what's wrong?" Auto urged her.

"Hâ€|Hâ€|Help m-m-me-e!" she croaked through her heavy breaths. By

the looks of it, she was having a breathing fit.

\_Thank God I can connect to the emergency services! \_Auto mentally said to himself and began to set his mind on tapping into the New Mombassa II emergency services lines to call for an ambulance, mentally praying that it would get here in time.

Unbeknownst to the two, somebody, or something else, was watching this occur through a kind of circular haze in a completely blinding white light that seemed to stretch on forever in all directions. Whatever this thing, or person, was, it stifled a laugh, knowing that this plan it had been formulating for so long now was all coming into place.

All that needed to happen now is if Eve would take the bait.

## 6. Stable, or unstable?

**\*\*Later that evening\*\***

In the corridors of the Spartan medical clinic, Hood was led down by a black nurse holding a data pad in her hand. The clinic was very busy tonight after some disturbance in the poorer parts of New Mombassa II on the city's outskirts and as they walked down the brightly lit hallway, several gurneys were rushed past them by doctors and/or nurses and many of the patients on them were wrapped in bloodied bandages or had oxygen masks over their faces to help them breathe. One woman even had a small blood stain on the hospital gown she had been given, which did make Hood feel a little bit ill but not a lot. After all, a survivor from the war, he was used to seeing these types of things.

"Eve has recovered a little bit now," the nurse said to Hood as they stopped and turned sideways to allow another gurney to pass them, this one carrying a man who had a swollen side of face and a tiny river of blood dripping from the bottom of his lip. "It was lucky that Auto A.I has contacted us otherwise we would have gotten to her in time,"

Hood nodded. "Yes, thank God for you, Auto," he muttered to himself.

He had been back at the New Mombassa II council hall when he had received news from the paramedics that Eve had had another fit and collapsed at her home and he had rushed out here as quickly as he could to check and see if she was alright. It was another thing to make his evening more hectic because Hood, next to fear over Eve, was worrying about himself now as he was in big trouble with the other councillors in the city.

This had started only a few hours ago, not long after the meeting with him, Eve and Vadumee in the old base outside the city. Apparently, Vadumee's ship had also been picked up by another radar post in the city and that someone had also managed to eavesdrop on the communication between it and Hood. That person had then re-laid this to the other councillors, who were less than happy because Hood, in their eyes, had been in contact with so called 'dangerous creatures' that were putting them and the city at risk, but Hood saw through it all. If there was one thing he knew about the councillors

was that, next to them being power hungry, scheming bastards, as with most politicians, they had provided the Elites with information on Covenant Loyalist forces during the war and he knew one or two of them had even fought with them Elites against the Covenant, but it was obvious that all of that was in the past and now the Elites were nothing more than infiltrators or spies or whatever for the Covenant in the eyes of these councillors and so they wanted to get rid of them, and Hood along with them as well.

The worst thing of it all, however, was that the majority of the councillors, even some of those who Hood deemed friends in the council of New Mombassa II, were against him and now with a majority against him, it was unlikely that he would stand for long in his position until he was kicked out. He even faced a prison sentence, and there was little he could do about it. He would just have to hope he would make it through this, but hope was just one thing that he had relied on so much over the past few years and it had gotten him virtually nowhere.

The nurse led Hood further on down the hallway towards a small door on the left wall near the end of the corridor. The nurse opened it to reveal a small square shaped room with light purple coloured walls ceiling with a plain grey floor. A window was on the wall opposite the door and below it placed horizontally was a hospital bed. Eve was resting on it with, donned in a hospital gown with a blanket placed over her and looked to be out cold. A heart monitoring machine was attached to her arm and at the moment it was steady, the beeps of each heartbeat ringing out into the air, penetrating the silence in the room.

On the cabinet next to the bed was a small purple, seven inch high avatar dressed in an army officer's uniform, which turned to face those who were entering the room when the door opened.

"Ah, Hood, It's good to see you," Auto said.

"Likewise, Auto," Hood replied, closing the door behind him and the nurse.

"Has she been alright?" the nurse asked him.

Auto nodded. "So far. She's calmed down from when she was brought in earlier and the doctor gave her some drugs to knock her out," he looked back at Eve with a sad gaze. "I feel really sorry for her." He muttered anxiously.

"Well, at least she is stable and her, thanks to you," the nurse said. "I'll leave you two here alone," she told them and left the room.

Hood walked over to Eve's bed and sat down on the side next to her, gazing at her peaceful face. It was a strange thing to see Eve almost a depressed wreck earlier on and now she looked really beautiful just lying there sleeping. What Hood could not figure out though was that why had Eve had another fit so soon after another. Usually they were quite spaced out between each other and signs and symptoms would be making themselves noticeable before the actual fit itself occurred, though this was probably a sign that maybe her conditioning was worsening. If it was wellâ€¦it would not be hard to know that she would have to be kept under tighter medical supervision in the

future.

Auto too was really worried for her. He had known about her fits via Hood in the past but it was quite shocking for him to see one up close on her, but that was not all that had him worried. Like Hood, he too was worried that Eve's condition was deteriorating further and he just had absolutely no idea why it was doing it now. These sorts of things, except on rare occasions, did not just happen in the blink of an eye. There were no heavier symptoms or pains or more frequent blackouts or fits beforehand, in fact before Auto had been told by one of the doctors that before the last fit Eve had, which was only a few days ago, she had been fine for about three and a half months. Why this one had suddenly come right now really did make him wonder.

"Was she awake when she calmed down earlier?" Hood asked Auto, who nodded.

"Only for a few minutes," he replied. "She said that she had some kind of vision when she collapsed, claimed that she had some kind of vision, like she saw something, or probably even someone,"

A concerned look etched across Hood's face. "Does she have any idea who it could be?"

Auto shook his head. "No, but she does think that this person, or thing, could be either way, called for help and then just disappeared as quickly as it appeared in front of her,"

Hood 'hmmmed' and looked back at Eve, confusion reigning in his eyes. So Eve had a vision? Now that was strange, and well that was quite, in a partial sense, concerning, probably because when she had been fighting the Covenant and the Flood and whatnot, she had had some strange experiences. Then again, however, her condition was probably causing her to hallucinate and make her think she was seeing this thing or person or whatever it was.

Still, he did keep it in his mind just in case she decided to talk about it when she woke up, though when that would happen, neither he nor Auto knew.

## 7. Sneaking out

Darkness, pitch black darkness. It surrounded her like a heavy fog and showed no signs of dispersing. Eve could barely even see her hand in front of her face. In fact, she was not even sure that she was even sitting on something, her mind switching to whether she was sitting on some kind of floor she just could not see because of the darkness or if she was on some kind of invisible floor that would disappear and make her fall into forever into darkness.

"Where am I?" she whispered anxiously, her blue eyes frantically going from left to right and looking over her shoulder, trying to visualize where she was.

All of a sudden, it happened. One minute, she was in pitch blackness, the next it all turned into a kind of grey fog that enveloped her. Eve slowly got up, her eyes still scanning the scene around her. Not really much of an improvement, but at least now she could now see



where she was.

\_How did I get here? \_She mentally asked herself, taking a step forward gingerly as if fearing that she would suddenly fall through some hole or off the edge of this invisible floor she was standing up on.

"Eâ€|Eâ€|" a voice croaked from somewhere.

She stopped dead. That voice! Where was it coming from? More importantly, who was saying it? Even though she could see who was saying it, somewhere she did recognize it. It had some kind of familiarity to her, but what exactly she just could not remember.

"Heâ€|Help!"

Eve began to look around her frantically upon hearing the voice once more, though this time it sounded closer, much closer. In fact, to her, with her good hearing, it sounded like it was only just a few feet behind her but when she looked over her shoulder, there was nothing, or nobody there, except fog. Was her mind playing tricks on her?

As she turned her head back ahead of her, she screamed and jumped backwards, landing on the ground or floor or whatever it was she was on, eyeing the figure standing in front of her nervously. Because of the thickness of the fog, she could not see it clearly but she could make out that this figure was a Human, or at least she thought it was, and looked to be a man. By the way he had his arms jutted out sideways, with the parts of the arms from the elbow onwards dangling down like rotting limbs, his head cocked partly to one side and knees slightly bent, he looked as though he was being held prisoner. Who was he, and why was he, if that was what was happening to him, being held prisoner?

"Eâ€|Eâ€|Eve!" the figure began to gasp out through heavy breaths His voice was deep, definitely a male. "Help! Please!"

Eve stared at him with a mixture of anxiousness and curiosity. This figure knew her name? How? How did he know her name? Who was he?

"Wh-who are you?" she asked him, getting up from the ground.

As if in reply to her question, the fog around the figure suddenly began to disperse, backing away as if it were a small predator backing away from It's kill and leaving it to a larger predator. Eve watched as the figure began to take a more noticeable form. She could see that the man was in a kind of bodysuit that wasâ€|a dark blue/grey colour with stranger markings all over it. Those markings were familiar to her somehow. Looking up at the arms, she saw there was a large bulge on the figure's right arm just a few inches from where the hand was. Her eyes followed the figure's body up past the neck where the bodysuit ended and saw the facial features becoming noticeable as the fog cleared around it. When it had cleared, Eve went wide-eyed, her mouth dropping open in shock, her hearth almost stopping It's beating.

She-she knew the man standing in front of her very well. He had

short, messy brown hair, hazel coloured eyes, a small scar down the side of his chin and several tiny scars across his cheeks near his eyes. It was a face she had seen many times before, the only difference being the extra scars around the eyes, and it had been one she loved.

It was 343 Guilty Spark, or his real name: Wally.

"W-Wally?" Eve breathed aghast, staring at him in utter shock, completely speechless.

The hazel eyes that were looking down at the ground/floor turned to look up at her blue eyes, allowing Eve to see the pain and anguish that raged inside them like an inferno.

"Eve!" he croaked. "Please! H-help me!"

Eve stepped towards him, a feeling inside her telling her that she had to help him. Well, she wanted to anyway because sheâ€|well, he was her friend and her lover. She would do anything to help him, but what was wrong with him though? Her eyes searched his body but there just did not seem to be anything, or anyone for that matter, that was holding him in place. No guards, no nails, no metallic ropes, no force fields or anything. Another voice in her head began to tell her that something was not right, but she did not listen to it. She had to, and wanted to help him.

As she reached out her hand towards him, looking sympathetically into his eyes, his hazel eyes suddenly turned a brown/dark green colour and the look of pain that filled them quickly changed into a glare, pointing directly at Eve. At once, his body seemed to somehow free itself fromâ€|whatever it was that had been holding him where he was and stood at It's full height. Eve withdrew and tensed herself. Even though Wally was still only about six foot, a few inches shorter than her tall height, she had been up against his strength, or at least a replica of his strength before and that had been when she had fought him on the new Halo Installation 04B ring five years ago, which had resulted in John and an old friend, and then an enemy of Wally and her, being killed. That was something she really did not want to go through again, but as she watched his hand clench tightly into fists, she felt like she was going to have to.

\_This can't be happening! \_her mind cried fearfully. \_He can't be like this!\_

"Wally, It's me!" Eve said to, backing away from him as he began to step towards her. "It's Eve! D-don't you remember me?!"

He opened his mouth to speak but just as he did the fog suddenly enveloped him once more, quickly surrounding him as if it were trying to protect Eve. She watched, after backing away a few more feet, as the figure began to change It's form. Wally seemed to grow and his hands released their clenched fists and dangled by his side. As he grew, a kind of dark cloak began to form around him, covering his entire body. A hood followed, which enveloped his head, leaving a small gap at the front for the face to look through, though Eve could not see it. She stared at him curiously, but with a sense of fear as well. What was happening to him?

The figure stepped forward out of the fog, which dispersed around him

as if it were afraid of him, towards Eve, the hood having to bend forward a little to look down on her as the figure was probably now about eight feet tall. She backed away in fear, raising her hands to try and protect herself, but she had little doubt that this thing would be put off by her defensive gesture, which only raised the level of fear inside her.

\*\*\*"Save him, Evelyn!" \*\*another voice suddenly growled aggressively at her, coming from the figure.

She stopped dead where she was, her eyes still trained on him. The figure stopped where it was.

"W-what?" she whispered anxiously.

\*\*\*"He's in danger! Go! He needs you!"\*\*

At first, Eve was too overcome with what had just happened to her to realise what he meant, but after a second she realised what he was trying to say. Her eyes widened. Wally! He was in danger, but how did this thing know!

"Who are you?" she asked him.

\*\*\*"Go and save him, Evelyn!" \*\*the figure almost barked at her, making her jump. \*\*\*"343 needs you! Go!"\*\*

All of a sudden, Eve felt her heart beating madly against her chest, getting faster and faster as if it were running marathon. Her breathing went hysterical and her vision began to go blurry. She felt her head spin, almost like she was going to be sick. By the looks of it, it was another blackout episode. What was going on with her? Where was she, who was this figure and why was he telling her that someone needed help?!

The blackness surrounded Eve once more, the greyness of the fog disappearing into thin air along with the figure. She felt her knees get weaker and collapsed onto them, her breaths now becoming much more spaced and ragged. Her arm thrust out in front of her to stop her from falling flat on her face but just like her legs, she felt the strength from her arm gradually fade. It was as if the life within her body was being drained out entirely. Her eyes started to flicker, easily surpassing her attempts to try and keep them open.

Finally, she gave in and collapsed into uncertaintyâ€¦

â€¦Only to awaken by shooting upright in a bed, her heart now hammering against her chest, sweat dripping down her forehead. Eve gazed at her surroundings. It was still dark, but she could feel blankets and that she was resting on a bed. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness and she could just make out a door, a bedside cabinet next to her bed and the drawn curtains on the window next to her. She was still in her hospital room.

\_Just a bad dream \_she thought with relief, only for it to be replaced with curiosity when she began to break it down in her mind.

It just did not make any sense though when she tried processing it in

her mind. Wally appears in front of her calling for help, then turns on her and almost attacks her. Then that figure appears and tells her that she has to rescue him. Who was this figure? Why did he come to her like that and how did he come to even know, if this was true, that Wally had to be rescued? Why did he have to be rescued any-hold on a minute.

Like a switch flicking on in her head, Eve began to think of the worst case scenario. What if—what if Wally did need to be rescued? What if he really was in danger? Even though it was a dream, it just felt so real and plus with what had happened to her five years ago in the war, she had told herself that anything that was to suddenly appear to you like this, which in films would likely be displaced as just pure fiction or hysteria by other people, then it had to be real, or at least have one aspect of it real.

"If he's in danger," Eve muttered to herself, her eyes quickly growing wide with the possibility of this situation. "Then— Oh, God! I-I have to save him!"

She almost leapt out of her bed when she stopped. How was she going to get to him in the first place? From what she could remember, Wally was on Sanghelios, the Elite home world and she could not run there. She was going to need a ship, but the problem was they were in the UNSC military base outside the city and there was much doubt in her mind whether the guards would let her in, them probably having been ordered to shoot intruders. Plus there were the security cameras and alarms that were scattered throughout the base and getting through them was in no way going to be easy.

Unless— Eve looked over at the data cord on the bedside cabinet. "Well, there's one person here who can help me," she muttered and reached over and picked up the data cord between her fingers. Quickly, she glanced around to make sure she was alone, though she doubted anyone would be up at this time of night and decided to eavesdrop on her. "Auto?" she whispered, giving the data cord a little shake as if to wake him up. "Auto, wake up!" she hissed at the object.

Just as she finished her whispering, her seven inch high avatar shot up out of the data cord, rubbing his head with his hand.

"Alright, alright, calm down! I'm awake!" he replied, easing her. He lowered his hand from his head and looked at her with a confused expression. "Why are you awake at this time of night, Eve?" he asked. "Don't you know what time it is?"

"Yes. It's time we got out of here," she replied abruptly. She sighed. "Look, Auto, we have to go,"

"Why?" he asked her and Eve explained everything to him about her dream, who, and what, she had seen in it and the possible message it was trying to give her. Auto listened with mixed expressions from surprise, particularly when she mentioned Wally, to anxiety when Eve had decided to go and help him.

"Alright, Eve, let me get this straight: You want to go out into space to Sanghelios and try and find Wally?" he repeated and she nodded. Almost at once, she saw how this managed to overwhelm him because he sighed and shook his head. "Eve, you literally are crazy!"

I said this many times to you in the war and-

"And I always told you that sometimes being crazy is the only way you can get somewhere," she interrupted him.

Auto sighed again. "Eve, have you even thought about hard this is? Y'know, how can you be sure this dream of yours is true? And even if it is, it's going to be virtually impossible getting to Sanghelios and you heard what Wally told you five years ago and what Vadumee said when they came here the other day: there's a war going on that planet and I know very well from past experience that you don't want to get involved in anything like that again,"

"Well, we won't then," she replied. "I'm only going there to find Wally, not to fight a war,"

Auto heaved another heavy sigh. "Eve, that's not the point! Neither of us have ever been to Sanghelios and with a war going on, who's to say we might run head long into a battlefield and be torn apart? This is literally a suicide mission,"

"Well, it can't be any worse than when we were on Halo," a pause hung between them as Eve waited for his response, which was him rubbing his hand down his face but stopping it over his mouth, a look of anxiety lingering in his eyes. This was a completely mad idea of hers and he was sure that she knew it as well as he did. "Look, Auto, I have to know if he's alive!" Eve continued. "And as I've told you, we're not going to war. We're going to get Wally,"

"Eve! Be serious!" Auto's voice suddenly lowered to being stern. "I mean, can we even get to Sanghelios? Look at you," he nodded to her hospital gown. "I really doubt they're just going to let you wonder in like that,"

"I'll find something at the base to change into. Now,"

She got up from the bed and walked over to the window and opened the curtains, the moonlight that only just lit up the ground outside flooded into the room. A small locked handle was on the bottom of the window. She grasped it and, pushing in the lock, lifted the handle, unlocking it and pushed the window open.

"We'll head over there quickly before the night ends," she told Auto, walking back over to the bedside cabinet and picking up the data cord in her hand.

Auto walked up her arm to her shoulder and sat down on it, grasping her shoulder tightly as Eve walked over to the window and climbed out, her feet touching the grass around the hospital, and quietly shut the window so as not to wake anyone up. Then, keeping low, she began to creep across the path near the wing of the clinic where her room was, the cool air of the night rushing through her.

"Really is refreshing being out here this late at night," she commented in a kind of loving manner as she briefly glanced up at the stars shining overhead in the ever-stretching blackness of the night sky.

"Can I just quickly ask you something, Eve?" Auto inquired.

"Go ahead," she answered.

"Do you even have a plan of getting to the base?"

She stopped dead on another batch of grass next to the path and, just through the light emanating from his avatar form onto her face, he saw her give him an annoyed look.

"You always have to bring little details up, don't you!" she told him, frustration seeping into her.

"Hey, I'm just trying to make sure that you don't run into a problem and then get arrested,"

She sighed and gave a little nod. "Right, sorry," she replied apologetically, her head turning left and right. "We just need to find a way toâ€¦" she trailed off, her eyes set on a large cylindrical shape about fifty feet from her near a small car park. "And I think I've found it," she muttered.

Before Auto could ask what it was, Eve was running towards it. As they neared it, Auto's outward sensor scanners registered it to be a bike shed. There was only door in and that was on the left end of the shed, which was the end facing them. Eve stopped outside the door and, from the light emanating from Auto, swore angrily under her breath. There was a lock on the door and no way to get it open.

"Damn it!" Eve hissed to herself. "We'll have to find another way to the base,"

"No need," Auto piped up and slid down Eve's arm to the lock and placed his hand on it. Eve watched him with a confused expression until the lock suddenly unlocked itself. She was amazed! "A new update they've given me," Auto told her when he saw the look of surprise on her face as he walked back up her arm and sat down on her shoulder.

"Impressive," Eve commented approvingly and pushed open the door into the bike shed.

There were only a few bikes locked here but Eve just wanted to pick one and get out of here. She rushed over to a BMX near her and Auto managed to unlock the lock on the chain wrapped around it and connected to the stand next to the bike. Eve pulled it off and threw it onto the ground and wheeled the bike outside. She boarded it and took a deep breath.

"Hold on, Auto," she warned him.

"Just don't go too fast, we're not doing a race here," he replied, a little tense with the coming ride, grasping her shoulder just to make sure he had a firm grip.

A second later, Eve was speeding off down the road away from the hospital in the direction of the base, the dim light from Auto's avatar lighting the way as she went like a will o' wisp as it travels over a lake.

## 8. Escape from Earth

**\*\*Thirty minutes later\*\***

Cycling across the savannah plains outside New Mombassa II in a hospital gown and in pitch darkness was something Eve never thought she would ever do, or even think of, but right now she was doing both, though her thinking was set on mostly trying not to fall off the bicycle and smash her face in on the ground. Doing this in darkness was an extra plus for her being crazy, as Auto would no doubt say to her, again, but also a downside because apart from the faint glow of Auto's avatar, she could barely see where the hell she was going. It was surprising that she had managed to stay on this bike for the last thirty minutes without slamming right into a building or lamppost but she still had a way to go before she reached the base.

"How much farther till we reach the base?" she asked Auto as she cycled on through the darkness.

"Not far, about another quarter of a mile if you keep going at this pace," he replied. "And be careful, they might have guards on duty with searchlights and CCTV cameras with motion detectors." He added.

Eve slammed her fingers on the brakes of the bicycle, momentarily filling the air with a loud screeching sound as the tires tried to halt her. When they had, her mind went blank with apprehension and shock, but what she really felt was an angry urge that swept through her like a wave breaking on the shore, and it was directed at Auto, which became obvious to him when her blue eyes glared at him dangerously.

"You didn't mention that when we left the clinic, Auto!" she snapped at him. She sighed heavily. "Well, this is just great. How the hell are we supposed to get into the base now? I mean with all this security around, we'll be lucky if we get ten feet!"

"Well, I can momentarily disable power in the base," he suggested. "That should give us enough time to find a way inside the base, but we'll have to be quick,"

Eve sighed. "Well, that's something," she replied lowly, but with a sense of hope as well, though it would still be hard getting into the base, and if they were seen, they were as good as dead.

She pushed herself forward and rode on towards the base, her mind contemplating how she could get into the base.

About ten minutes later, Eve skidded to a halt near a small boulder in the middle of an arid plain. About three hundred feet ahead of her were the lights of a base. She could just make out the huge spotlight towers, the thick wire fence that surrounded the place, several buildings that were silhouetted against the spotlights, which were moving across the ground like rays of the sun, and several figures that were scattered about around the wire fence. Soldiers on guard.

"Alright, we know what exactly we're up against," Eve muttered to Auto. "Question is; how do we get in now,"

A pause filled the air for a moment. Well, Auto had his suggestion for breaking in at the ready, but even if they were to get in, what if the power came back on before they actually got inside? Or what if someone saw her? Then there was the inside of the base itself. Even if they did manage to get in, walking around in a hospital gown was going to draw a lot of attention and there was no doubt they would be arrested or probably even fired on by any guards that did see them.

Then, Eve felt Auto tap her on the cheek and he pointed over to a section of the fence. "Look, over there," he whispered.

She looked and saw a pair of headlights on a truck approach the fence near where one of the soldiers was standing. They watched as the soldier walked forward and the headlights slowed to a halt in front of him. The soldier stood next to the side of the truck near the headlights for a moment, almost as still as a statue, save for the movement on the side of his body, until he withdrew and made a gesture with his arm. The truck moved on and a section of the fence automatically opened to allow the vehicle into the base.

"No doubt that's how you're gonna get us in," Auto said to Eve.

"You bet," she replied, getting off the bike and leaving it on the ground. "Just be ready to disable all the power in the base so we can get in,"

"Right," he nodded.

Eve ran towards the base, but kept low and remained in the darkness so as not to be seen by any cameras or be caught as a silhouette in the light from one of the towers. Her eyes were fixed on the soldier and she had to knock him down, and out, pull him away and then take his uniform before power came back on. The only thing that would bring this plan to a halt was if the soldier was to shout out in terror when she got to him so she had to be quick in getting rid of him.

Closer and closer she crept to the figure. Just under one hundred feet from him, she clenched her fist as tightly as it would go. At about seventy feet, she could hear him humming to himself, a soft tune. At fifty feet, she could make out a weapon in his hand, which at about thirty feet, she saw was a battle rifle, a weapon she had used much in the war years ago. Twenty feet, she suddenly stopped and looked at Auto.

"Do it," she whispered.

He nodded and closed his eyes and bent his head forward a little as if he was praying.

Almost simultaneously, every light and electrical device shut off in the base, followed immediately by surprised shouting from inside the base. Eve heard the soldier in front of her whip round to see what had caused the sudden power outage and, seeing her chance, lunged forward.

The soldier was taken completely by surprise and struggled violently against Eve as she clamped her hand over his mouth to prevent him



from crying out for help. She tried to pull him down but it was proving difficult as he was quite heavily built. He even almost pushed her off him at one point, but managed to stop him by wrapping her arms around his chest and neck tightly to keep a firm grip.

\_Time to put him to sleep! \_Eve thought.

She raised her hand with the clenched fist and slammed it into his side as hard as she could. The soldier's eyes widened with pain and his knees gave way, to which Eve stepped off him. Eve struck him again, this time in the stomach, winding him and leaving the soldier gasping for air. Then with a final punch to the face, she knocked him out cold. That was one part of her plan out of the way.

Auto, who had hidden under the gown next to the gap where Eve's head came through, pulled himself up from underneath it.

"Well, that wasâ€¦quite a show," he commented quietly, staring down at the soldier with shock. "Is he gonna be okay?" he asked her.

"Yeah, he'll be fine," Eve replied, picking him up under the shoulders and dragging him away from the fence, but because of his slightly taller height and heavier build, it was quite hard for her but she managed to drag him further away in the end, about one hundred feet or so from the fence before she dropped him on the ground and looked at Auto. "Alright, on the ground and no peeking," she said to him firmly, picking him up and putting him on the ground.

"Then pass me my data cord," he replied.

Eve did so. Auto rested his hands on the object and he disappeared into it, which would have been fine under normal circumstances but as Eve took off her gown, she put it over the data cord just to make sure. Then, being quick and careful so as not to wake the soldier up, she took off his uniform and put it on. It was slightly baggy, but it fitted enough for her to not look conspicuous, though the only problem was she did not have a helmet and if anyone saw her, it would really give her away. She would have to be very quick in getting into the base and finding a ship or fighter or something to escape from here.

\_"Okay, can I come out from under here now?" \_she heard Auto's voice ask from under the hospital gown.

Eve knelt down and threw the gown off the data cord, which she took between her fingers and rested on her shoulder. Auto's avatar rose up and sat on her shoulder.

"I hope you didn't peek," Eve said to him.

"And why would I do that?" he replied sarcastically.

She rolled her eyes and, picking up the battle rifle, ran back over to the gate; Auto shrinking back into the data cord. Luckily, the gate was still open from where the truck had entered the base, saving her the trouble of having to try and climb in, and she went right into the base, her ears filled with the shouting from many different

voices throughout the base.

\_"How the hell did we lose power?!"\_

\_"Somebody go check the generators!"\_

\_"Are we getting attacked?"\_

\_"Check the perimeter! Make sure nobody tries to get in!"\_

Those voices radiated through the air all around her, but Eve, though worried that more soldiers would appear or that the power to the base would suddenly come back on, was unhindered. She had to find a way into the base. Problem was; her little plan had an obstacle for her as well as everyone else. Where was the way in? She could barely see where she was going in the darkness and if she was not careful, she could run into someone and they would identify her and take her away.

Her eyes turned frantically left and right, trying to find a way in. Damn it! Where was the main entrance to the base?!

"Auto, which way do we have to go?" she asked him, keeping her voice quite so as not to attract unwanted attention.

"Keep going ahead and then I'll tell you where to go next," he replied.

Eve, deciding not to argue, as she usually would when faced with an answer like that, obeyed and ran ahead. The voices of the shouting soldiers throughout the base continued to ring around her. She passed two soldiers near a tower who were shouting up to a third on the top of the tower in trying to get the searchlight there to start working again. Another soldier was checking the fuse boxes on the side of a building a few tens of feet further on from the tower. A torch was at his feet and it was on. Eve steered clear of him but luckily he was too preoccupied to notice her.

"Alright, up ahead to your left a little bit are a few buildings and one of them leads down underground," Auto said to her.

"Let's just hope we don't run into anyone that's coming up," Eve replied.

"Actually, you mean going down," Auto corrected her. "The generators are underground,"

"Oh, great!" Eve groaned lowly as she began to make out the forms of large buildings about fifty feet ahead of her through the darkness. "Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse!"

"Trust me, Eve. It could have, and probably may do knowing our luck,"

Eve stifled a laugh as she slowed down when she reached the building nearest her. "Don't be too predictable, Auto. Rightâ€¦is this the right one?"

She felt around for a window or doorknob to get in. After about two seconds, she found the latter and pushed it open, stepped inside and

closed the door behind her. Auto's avatar rose up out of her shoulder, giving the room a dim light. Eve could just about make out that they were in a large square shaped room with two filing cabinets up against the top right corner, several chairs against the wall behind her either side of the door and a lightshade covering a light bulb. On the wall behind Eve to the left of the door was a slightly open window. On the wall ahead of her was the entrance to a long corridor that seemed to end completely in pitch black darkness. By the looks of it, that was the way she had to go, but just to be sureâ€¦

"Is that the way underground, Auto?" Eve asked him.

"Yeah," he replied. "There should be some stairs or a lift at the end, they should take you directly down into the lower parts of the base,"

Calls and shouting from outside, which gradually grew louder, drew Eve's attention to the window and worry gripped her like an invisible hand. Soldiers were coming! They had to move now.

She ran down the corridor, quickly being enveloped by it, giving her the feeling that the darkness would have consumed her were it not for the dim light coming from Auto's avatar. As she moved on, the light from Auto revealed a flight of stairs next to a wall, which was the end of the corridor, to her left that led down a large passageway. This was it. She ran down the steps, trying to be as quiet as a mouse so as not to attract the attention of any guards. As she neared the bottom, a corridor became visible and it widened to a large doorway about ten feet ahead of the bottom of the stairs. She ran through the doorway and found herself in a kind of corridor intersection that was made of bare stone walls and had fluorescent lights on the ceilings.

\_Oh great! \_Eve mentally groaned to herself with annoyance. \_Now we're really in a bad situation!\_

"Don't worry, Eve, I know a way in which we can get out of here," Auto said to her reassuringly.

"How?" Eve asked him.

"The corridor ahead of us leads to a large hanger and there's a fighter there with which we can use to get out of here and get to Sanghelios," he explained. "And don't worry," he added quickly when Eve was about to ask how they were to get the fighter out of the underground hanger into space. "I'll open the blast doors so we can le-

He was suddenly cut off when the lights above them began to flicker on and off for a few seconds as if they were trying to set themselves on fire. Eve looked up and was almost blinded as the lights turned on, lighting up the corridors.

\_"Emergency power is online. Worker crews, report to the generators immediately!" \_a voice that rolled out through the corridor system crackled out over a hidden intercom.

"Best get moving," Eve replied, almost as if on cue and ran on ahead towards the end of the corridor, which led to a T intersection with a

large blast door on the end. Above the door on the wall was the word **\*\*Hanger\*\***. That was their ticket out of this base and to Sanghelios.

As Eve neared it, she began to feel overwhelmed. This was it! She was going to be able to see Wally again! Though questions still burst about in her mind about this figure, who had somehow come to her in her dreams and told her about Wally being trapped, she just pushed them aside and set her mind only on seeing him again, and that made her the more determined on getting out of here

She was just metres from the blast door to the hanger, her heart beating madly inside her, not only from the running but over the ecstatic joy of getting to her friend. She is almost thereâ€¦

"Eve!"

All of a sudden, she skidded to a halt, almost hitting the door and looked to her right. Standing there was Hood in his UNSC officer's uniform. He stood about five feet from her, his eyes staring at her with disbelief in them. What was she doing here? How had she gotten out of the hospital?

"What are you doing here, Eve?" he breathed in shock but before he could continue further, Eve cut him off.

"Don't try and stop us, Hood!" she replied sharply. "We're going to Sanghelios!" she told him bluntly.

He blinked, unable to believe what he had just heard. "What! Why?!"

"We're going to save Wally, sir," Auto told him. "And this is Eve's idea, not mine," he quickly added, motioning towards her, though he did not see the slight glare from her when he said that.

Hood shook his head, unable to process what was going on. He had been coming out here to see if there were any workers going to the generators after the emergency power turned back on and now all of a sudden he runs right into an escaped hospital patient and the Intelligent A.I unit he had left with her. This wasâ€¦ unreal to say the least, but at the same time a little voice inside his brain was telling him that maybe this was a good idea despite the fact that it was completely mad.

Voices from the stairs drew the three's attention. Hood grabbed Eve's arm and pulled her behind the wall of the corridor.

"Wait here, Eve," he muttered to her and stepped out from behind the corridor wall.

At the end of the corridor, a group of six workers ran down the steps to the corridor, followed by another three soldiers. The workers quickly ran down the right corridor but one of the soldiers stopped as he saw Hood.

"Sir!" he called out. "We're going to fix the generators, see what went wrong,"

"Right, I'll be with you in a minute," Hood replied. The soldier nodded and led his two colleagues down the right corridor after the workers.

When they were gone, Hood turned back to Eve. "Eve, you're expecting me to say that you're crazy," he said to her and she nodded expectantly. "Well, you are, and you too, Auto. But—" he paused for a moment and heaved a heavy sigh. "I'm glad at the same time,"

Eve gave him a confused look. "Why?" she asked.

"Well, I think you've finally seen sense in that you're needed by your friends,"

Eve looked down at the floor guiltily for a moment before her blue eyes looked back up at Hood.

"Hood, I just need to get this clear with you," she said lowly as if in a regrettable, probably even sad manner. "Me and Auto are not going to fight a war, we're going just to save Wally. That's it,"

Hood nodded when he heard this. "Right," he muttered lowly and sighed again. "Well—the least I can do is give you some help," he said. "In fact, follow me," he told her and rushed past her back up the corridor towards a small door at the end. Eve and Auto gave each other puzzled looks but she decided to follow.

When they reached the door, it opened automatically and they found themselves in a small square shaped room with bare stone walls, floor and ceiling and a small doorway on the wall opposite the entrance that led left. A small fluorescent light came to life as its motion detector picked up the three entering the room, momentarily blinding them.

"Why are we in here?" Eve asked Hood.

"In there's something you'll definitely need," Hood replied, motioning towards the doorway ahead of them.

Puzzled, Eve walked over to the doorway and poked her head around the corner. Almost as soon as she had, her eyes widened a little in surprise and Auto stifled a laugh and muttered: "Talk about the past coming back!"

On a peg drilled onto the wall ahead of them was a familiar white looking bodysuit with openings for the hands and head and had boots that were part of the suit. It was one Eve had seen before many times. In fact, this was the one she had worn during the war, or one of the ones she had worn to be correct. This was the second one as the first one was badly damaged and torn during her first battle on the first Halo ring.

"Thought you'd need it," Hood said, causing Eve and Auto to look over her shoulder to see him with his arms folded but with a smile on his face. "I've kept it aside in case you ever did come back,"

A small laugh passed Eve's lips. "And it was a good thing you did," she replied. She held up her hand with the data cord to Auto and he stepped onto it. "I'll be a few seconds," she told him as she handed

him to Hood.

The old UNSC officer nodded. "Be quick, though," he warned her cautiously.

Eve retreated into the small room and took off the soldier's uniform and hung it on the peg once she had taken the bodysuit off it. She dressed into the bodysuit and, for some strange reason, or at least strange to anyone else who might have felt this emotion as well, she felt reassured in putting it back on. It was as if she was putting back on a part of her past, despite it being what had caused her to suffer the loss of many friends in the war long ago. On the other hand, it was also something that had helped her in saving her race and the few friends she could. Also, where she was going, she was definitely going to need it.

After about a minute, she stepped out of the room and gazed down at herself. The feeling of the bodysuit Dorvask material felt soothing against her skin. She turned her hands over twice as if she was a robot admiring its movable hands after being activated.

"Just like old times," Auto said, gazing admiringly at her with folded arms.

She smiled. "Thanks, Auto," she replied as she took the data cord and him from Hood and placed them on her shoulder, the data cord sinking into her shoulder, just as it had done years ago. "And don't give me a perverted look," she added to him in a fake firm, but still serious tone.

"Sorry," he replied apologetically.

"Alright, come on," Hood said, snapping them back into reality. "We have to go now. Back to the hanger,"

They followed him out of the room down the corridor towards the hanger entrance. When they reached it, Hood placed his hand on a built in scanning device on the door where the lock would usually be. A beep emitted from the door and it opened. The two ran into the hanger.

It was huge! The hanger was about one hundred and fifty metres in length and just under twice in width. Walls covered all sides of the hanger, but the ceiling, which was a dome shape, had a large cylindrical hole, just above the point where the rectangular side of the wall met the curved bottom of the ceiling, leading up towards the surface, which the night was just visible through the opening at the other end. That was Eve and Auto's way out of the hanger. Scattered about along the left and right walls were the large manta ray longsword fighters, the two sides of fighters facing each other as if they were rivals that were to face each other until they were to go against one another.

"This way, Eve," Hood said to her and she followed him away from the door towards the nearest fighters parked on the left side, unaware of the CCTV camera that was now watching them and recording everything they were saying.

When they reached the back of the fighter, Hood reached up and pressed one of the buttons on the control panel next to the door that

would lower down from the fighter and allow those who were to pilot the craft board it. As the mechanical gear whirred and the door lowered down, he looked back at Eve.

"Well, Eve," he breathed. He paused for a moment, unable to put what he wanted to say into words, but just nodded after a second or two. "Good luck to you two,"

She smiled and embraced him tightly. "Thanks, Hood," she replied as he embraced her back. They held each other for a moment before withdrawing.

"Hood, Iâ€¦I just wanted to quickly apologise forâ€¦the way I was acting to you," Eve said. "Iâ€¦I didn't me-"

"Eve, don't worry about it," Hood cut her off in a reassuring voice. "It's fine. I'm just glad I could help you,"

She smiled at him. "Thanks,"

He nodded. "Right, you two better get out of here before security show up,"

Eve nodded and, with a final thank you, she ran onto the long sword fighter and plonked herself down in the seat. Auto ran down her hand and, placing his hand on the control panel, disappeared into it. Behind her, Eve heard the rear entrance to the fighter close. The engines lit up and roared to life, sending a powerful backdraft that looked as though it would blow the walls open. The mechanical legs of the fighter folded themselves up and were lifted into the craft.

Hood ran back towards the door to avoid the blast from the engines and looked back at the cog pit. Eve, who was just visible in the seat, looked out and gave a final wave to him and a thumbs up, probably her saying \_"Thanks Hood, and goodbye," \_and he replied with a wave and a nod.

\_Stay safe, Eve \_he mentally said to himself.

The fighter jolted slightly as it rose up into the air and hovered for a moment as if it were debating what It's next move should be. Then, it slowly pointed up at a forty degree angle, the front facing the hole that was just wide enough for a longsword fighter to fly through. Hood covered his ears and shut his eyes, knowing what was coming.

\_\*\*BOOM! \*\*\_With a loud sonic boom, the fighter shot up out of the hanger through the exit hole like a bullet leaving a gun, the blast knocking Hood off his feet to the floor. As he picked himself up, he watched as the fighter filled the space in the cylindrical hole for a moment, blocking out the view of the outside world. Then, as if hope was breaking through a blockage of tragedy and sadness, the fighter left the hole and quickly disappeared into the night sky outside.

Hood smiled to himself. They were out of here. Eve and Auto were safe.

Behind him, the door opened and the group of three soldiers who Hood

had seen in the corridor minutes ago appeared in the doorway. He turned to face the, expecting them to be confused in what he was doing in here and why he had not joined them to see what the problem with the generators was.

What he got was the complete opposite. The soldiers knew what had happened. In fact, next to the generator room was the security room which was where the computer that held the videos of the CCTV cameras was located and they had seen what and heard what had happened between Eve and Hood, and they were not at all pleased.

"Hood!" one of them barked aggressively, making his mind go blank with fear, not just in the voice but in that he was now being called by his name rather than lord Hood or sir. "You're coming with us!"

"Boy, are you in \_big \_trouble!" another growled angrily.

Hood gulped and looked back up at the hole and the night sky as if he could see the fighter make It's way to freedom from here. He had gotten the two out of this place, but it looked like now he was going to pay for doing so with his life.

## 9. Interrogation

**\*\*Ten minutes later\*\***

The door to the base's HQ office flew open with a bang and Hood was pushed inside by two burly soldiers out in the corridor. As he stood up straight, his eyes searched the room around him. The office was a large square shape with the usual desk, filing cabinets, florescent light and several holographic pictures on the walls of the old New Mombassa and the surrounding countryside. What was different this time was that, apart from Hood, there were two men behind the desk, one sitting, and the other standing. Upon seeing them, Hood gulped; a nervous look etching across his face.

The man sitting down was about forty, much younger than Hood and by no means as friendly. He had a short crop of blonde hair and was wearing a usual grey suit with a tie with black shoes, obviously giving the business man-like look. His name was Michael, an American who had moved out here years ago to try and re-establish a pro-American, or at least in the sense to his faction's, control over the region. The standing man was black and slightly younger, about thirty seven but was more heavily built than his friend. He had black hair and was also wearing a suit. His name was Richard. Both gave Hood cold looks as he came in, meaning that they were not in a friendly mood, let alone forgiving for what they had just been told what had happened underground.

"Well, well," Michael said. "We meet again, Hood. Sit down,"

He did not argue and sat down on the chair in front of him, his nervous eyes watching Michael and Richard in front of him, fearing as if they were suddenly going to press a hidden button and send him down into an abyss of traps or into a death pit or something horrible like that. Michael brought his hands together in mid-air in front of his face and lowered them to desk.



"Alright, you two can wait outside," Richard said to the soldiers at the door. They nodded and closed the door behind them, leaving the three alone and Hood at the mercy of these two.

Although they looked like any normal politicians, to Hood they were that but with the word criminal added before both of their names. They were two politicians who were opposed to Hood in the High Council in New Mombassa II and were hoping to, like any politician or member of the court or whatever has tried to do over history, pass through what they wanted, and these two they were especially fierce in doing just that because they would stop at nothing, not even the limits of taking the lives of others. Michael, as explained, was here to try and establish a region that would be supportive to his faction in America. Richard was the head of another political group/faction that was trying to bring order and stability to the region and he had, in the last year or so, become very attached to Michael and his goals. This combination of cronies may not sound very threatening to other groups of people that Hood had learnt of throughout history, but in a small region like this there was no worse pair.

"I take it you know why you're here?" Michael asked him, though his voice told Hood that he expected him to know the answer. A deadly pause hung between them as Michael and Richard waited for an answer. "Well?" Michael added a few seconds later, his voice now more demanding.

Hood swallowed hard, his heart rate accelerating with every passing second. "Umâ€|y-yes!" he answered.

"Good," Michael replied, sitting back in his chair. "It was surprising that you were seen with Eve, y'know, on the hanger's CCTV camera. At first I thought it was impossible, but then I heard that she had gone missing from the New Mombassa II clinic and then I began to think otherwise,"

Hood was unsure, mainly because he was too afraid to take his eyes off these two, but he could have sworn that sweat was beginning to form on his forehead and run down his face. These two were not violent, or at least not in a full sense, but he did have a feeling that they might make him talk using more than just words.

Michael leaned forward in his seat, his green eyes staring hard and carving deep into Hood like a drill.

"Where has she gone?" he said calmly to Hood.

He shifted a little in his chair, still not taking his eyes off Michael or Richard, his hands fiddling with each other in nervous anticipation.

"Iâ€|I don't know where," he replied anxiously.

Upon hearing this, Hood immediately saw the look on Michael's face change as his eyes narrowed and he saw his jaw tighten, probably meaning his teeth were clenching behind his closed lips. Michael even began to rise up out of his seat.

"I'm not going to ask you again, Hood!" his voice had dropped to a whisper as he stood up at his full height to try and make himself look intimidating. "Where has Eve gone?" he repeated.

"I've just told you, I don't know," Hood answered bluntly, though there was fear in his reply.

Michael took a step out from behind his desk, but Richard stopped him.

"Michael, sit down," he said to him firmly. "Doing this will not make him talk,"

Michael glared at him and then at Hood, but listened to Richard and sat down. That was at least one thing Hood could count on with them. Michael was the political superior out of the pair of them but Richard had the more reasoning sense and, quite frankly, Hood was glad he was here with Michael to stop him from trying to hurt him.

"Now Hood," Richard took over the conversation, stepping forward so he was next to the desk, his hands behind his back. "We're trying to be reasonable with you. You know very well that you were with an escaped clinical patient and you have let her go-

"And you have also allowed a Sangheili ship to land without our authorization," Michael interrupted.

Richard sighed. "Yes and that as well. You do realise that you could face exclusion from the council and even a possible prison sentence for these crimes,"

"And as for your friend, we can just order her to be shot down," Michael added, but was silenced from a dark glare from Richard, who was getting fed with him interrupting.

Hood, now calmer that he was talking with the more co-operative of the two, straightened himself up in his chair, trying to look defiant.

"I know," he replied. "But, with the way things have been going, I think would rather accept that. Besides-" his gaze shifted to Michael. "You know very well that your decision is a bad idea for you two as well as any of your friends in the council as well as across the world,"

Michael's glare deepened but he said nothing. Richard placed a hand on the desk and leant on it partially, his brown eyes staring at Hood with annoyance but in no way was he defeated, yet.

"Alright, Hood, we'll play your game," he said. "But you will be under house arrest for the time being until further notice. Guards!"

As if on cue, the door opened and the two guards that had brought Hood to Michael and Richard walked in, their battle rifles held tightly in their hands.

"Take him back to his house and make sure he stays there," Richard told them. They nodded and led Hood out of the room.

When they were gone, Richard wheeled round to Michael.

"Are you completely idiotic?!" he snapped at him angrily. "Do you realise how right he was about your decision?"

Michael looked down at the desk with sorrow and anger raging in his eyes. "It was to try and make him yield," he muttered, though it was loud enough for Richard to hear him.

However, he knew very well that Hood was right of the dangers of his decision. If Eve had been shot down on his ordersâ€|there would beâ€|well, to say the least, global anarchy. After all, Eve was the one who had virtually saved Humanity and the galaxy from destruction and if he had her killed, which there was no doubt that even if he tried to cover it up, Hood would spread the order of who had been on that fighter, then virtually the whole world would rise up against those who had killed her. Hood would have the whole world on his side and plus, he would not allow Eve to be killed. Michael, in a sense, felt the same way as he owed his life to her just as much as everyone else did.

They would have to find another way to get her back and keep her here where she could not cause any trouble, and it was then that an idea popped into his head.

"Richard!" Michael announced, shooting up from his seat. "Have Tyson and the Elite Marines Squadron prepare for a little journey,"

"What are they going to do?" Richard asked, confused.

"They're going to get Eve back,"

## 10. Crash land on Sanghelios

**\*\*Hours later\*\***

**\*\*Unknown sector of space\*\***

The vastness of space stretched further than the eye could see in all directions, It's immense size just un-comprehensible to all life within it. The millions upon millions of stars lit up this vast place like miniscule lamps. Each were like tiny rays of hope that cut through the darkness and told those who were scattered throughout the universe looking for adventure that there was a chance they could fulfil that passion of theirs, almost as if the stars themselves were calling to those who wished to explore the galaxy and those beyond it, beckoning them to come to them. It was truly a peaceful scene.

All of a sudden, a bright flash momentarily seemed to enclose around space, then as quick as it came it disappeared. Everything was normal, still the same before the flash. Wellâ€|actually, there was one tiny little difference, and that was a manta ray shaped fighter flying through space, a longsword fighter.

Inside the cog pit, Eve sat in the seat, staring out of the window in front of her at the vastness of space that rushed past her, almost as if she was in a trance. Her blue eyes were now searching everything that went by, trying to find the planet Sanghelios. Though Auto had already put in the co-ordinates of the planet's location among the stars and was auto-piloting it towards their destination, Eve was

just filled with desperation to try and find this planet as quickly as they could so they could land and begin searching for Wally. That was her sole directive now and she was not going to stop until she found him.

On the control panel in front of her, Auto's seven inch high avatar rose up out of it.

"Alright, we're set on the course for Sanghelios and we should reach it soon," he said to Eve, but as he looked up at her he saw that she was not listening, but continued staring ahead out of the window at the passing stars. "Eve?" he inquired, raising his voice slightly.

She shook her head and blinked several times and looked down at him as if noticing him for the first time.

"Oh, sorry, Auto," she replied quietly.

"You looked a little lost," he told her with concern lingering in his voice. "Are you okay?"

She nodded a little. "Yeah, I'm fine. I just want to try and get there quickly,"

"You really are worried about him, aren't you?"

Another nod. "Yes. Weird thing is that it was only earlier that I really began to think of Wally, when I had that dream," she sighed. "I really do think he's in danger,"

Auto breathed in deeply. He was having second doubts about this so called 'dream' Eve had had and he hated having to say this, but it was just to make sure so they were not wasting their time or going headfirst right into a trap.

"Eve, has it not occurred to you that you may have been exaggerating or just having a nightmare?" he asked her, trying to point something out.

The look on her face lowered to one of slight annoyance, though this was not the first time she had had Auto disagree with her, but still she was not happy that he was not being very supportive of her in what she was doing as she had done before.

"Auto, I'm telling, what I saw was \_not \_a nightmare or a dream or me having hallucinations or whatever!" she replied sternly. "I'm telling you, I saw this person in front of me and he told me that Wally was in danger and I had to rescue him!"

"Eve, just think for a minute! You might have been having a nightmare, this does happen to people. And even if what you saw was true, don't you think it might be a trap?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, think back to the war raging on the planet, Eve. I'm pretty sure that the Brutes and any Covenant loyalists still want your head after what you did to them in the war and they could probably be using Wally as a bait for you, to try and lure you out to them so

they can get you,"

"Auto, are you implying that Wally could be dead?" Eve leaned forward in her seat towards him, the look on her face going slightly darker, but he was unnerved by this.

"No, I'm just saying that they could use him to get you. I mean; remember Tartarus, the Brute chieftain?" Eve nodded at this. "Well, he saw you with Wally back on Delta Halo's library and he might have already figured it out himself that you and him were lovers and he might have spread the word, soâ€¦It's not hard to see it that way," he told her reasonably.

She huffed and sat back in the pilot's seat, annoyed, but somewhere in her mind a little voice was saying that Auto did have a point. The theories he was suggesting were possible but Eve was not going to take any chances.

"We'll go and make sure," she told him after a few moments of silence, her voice becoming firm again. "I have to know if what I saw was true or not, Auto, and I'm not going to stop!"

"Eve, we might just be wasting our time doing this!" Auto snapped at her, his voice beginning to rise now. "And we're already in really big trouble! Do you know what could happen to us when we go back!"

"I'm willing to accept it, Auto," she told him in a confident and unafraid voice. "If I do get arrested, at least Wally will be back here on Earth,"

"Or he won't even be coming back with us and you'll be landed in the brig forâ€¦God knows how long and I'll get de-programmed or something," Auto pointed out to her firmly.

By this point, Eve had really had enough and she shouted at him angrily.

"Auto! Will you stop it! Just pack it in, will you! I'm doing this whether you like it or not and I \_am\_ going to find Wally and find out if he's alive or not! If you want to stay here in this fighter, then fine! I don't need to fully rely on you, okay?!"

She took several deep breaths to try and calm down whilst Auto just stared at her, dumbfounded by what she had just said to him. Even though he was still thinking that what she was doing was not a good idea, he really was shocked, to say the least, over her willingness to do such a drastic action, one that had already made them wanted and could well and truly even get them killed. Though this was not the first time Eve had chosen to do something like this, it was mad that this time she was doing because she herself had chosen to do so without any other thoughts of who she might be saving or helping or whatever, not like when she had destroyed the first Halo in order to save the galaxy years ago. This time, she was doing this just to save Wally and she was willing to have herself put in danger because of that. It was really un-comprehensible for Auto to understand, let alone believe it was actually happening.

Just then, a small beeping sound emitted from the control panel. Both looked towards it and then out of the window into space. Almost at

once, their eyes were set on a large red/green planet with two smaller planets, no doubt moons, hovering around it. Eve's eyes lit up and she pressed a button that made the ship's co-ordinates lock onto the large body in front of her fighter. A few beeps emitted from a small hologram of the planet that appeared next to the button as the co-ordinates of it. After another second, the words: \*\*Planet identified: Sanghelios \*\*appeared above the planet. Eve's heart leapt upon seeing this.

"Yes!" she exclaimed happily. "Alright, we're almost there!" she added.

She stood up from her seat and walked over to the side window, staring at the planet as they neared it, her mind filling with hope that she was to soon find and be reunited with her long lost friend, that she was going to be with him again after not seeing him for so long. It just made her almost happy to the point of breaking down, which was even slightly noticeable as a few tears began to form in her ears.

As Eve watched the approaching Sanghelios, Auto on the control panel suddenly heard a repeating beep erupt, followed by a red light flashing on the panel. When he looked at it, he quickly commanded the computer, technically, to show him what was happening. A small holographic image of the fighter appeared and behind it two flashing red lights also appeared. Both seemed to be moving towards the fighter, which worried Auto at first, but it was when the words \*\*Hostile targets approaching \*\*flashed up next to the red dots that he became terrified. They were being attacked!

"Eve, come over here quickly!" he called to her worryingly.

She heard him and, with a roll of her eyes, thinking that he was going to give her another lecture on that they were wasting their time, walked over to him. He pointed to the holographic image and as soon as she saw it, her eyes went wide with fear.

"Oh no-"

\*\*BOOM! \*\*The fighter shook wildly as if it were being thrown around like a toy, throwing Eve to the floor of the fighter and almost striking her head on the edge of the seat. The cog pit immediately began to flash a dark red colour and a low constant beeping alarm sounded throughout the craft. As she got up, the small holographic screen where the fighter had been suddenly fizzed out and several sparks began to fly from it.

"Oh shit!" Eve muttered as she sat down in her seat and strapped herself in. She took Auto's data cord out and placed it on her shoulder, the object sinking into it like quicksand, and his avatar rose up on her shoulder. "We're in big trouble," she said to him as she grabbed the fighter's controls and banked it to the left slightly.

"It's probably the Brutes using Seraphs," he said to her. "Always real deadly those things,"

"And just our luck, we seem to attract them as soon as we come anywhere near a Covenant held place," Eve muttered.

**\*\*BOOM! \*\***The craft shook again, though this time it sounded more like a train ploughing into the craft and, looking behind them, the two saw fire erupt at the back. A strangled, computer voice erupted from the control panel, Eve and Auto only just managing to capture: **\*\*"Damage critical! 50% sustained!"\*\***

"Oh no!" Eve began to panic. "How far are we from Sanghelios, Auto?" she asked him in a desperate voice.

He shut his eyes for a moment, his mind trying to calculate the distance from them to the planet, and then re-opened them and looked back at Eve.

"A few hundred thousand miles, we'll be hitting the atmosphere soon," he told her.

The cog pit suddenly lit up a dark purple colour as a blast shot past the fighter, becoming visible to the two. That was a close call, but there was no doubt that another blast would surely finish them off. Eve tried to turn the craft right, but the steering would not budge an inch. Panic began to fill her and she tried again and again, but it was no use. Oh great, they had destroyed the steering mechanism. Now they really were doomed.

Thenâ€¦**\*\*BOOM! \*\***The craft shook wildly once again, only this time the fire at the back was now extremely fierce. The beeping sound now silenced completely and the computer voice erupted from the control panel once again: **\*\*"Alert! Malfunction of engines! Damage at critical 85%"\*\***

BOOM! Another explosion erupted on the engines as the fuel began to feed the fire and spread it further.

**\*\*"Power draining! Allâ€¦powerâ€¦lo-o-o-s-s-s-t-t!" \*\***the voice turned off and the control panel went dead. The alarm stopped the red light disappeared, along with the regular light that had filled the cog pit before the attack began, plunging Eve and Auto into darkness.

"Oh no!" Eve cried in a panicked voice and looked at Auto with heavy fear in her eyes. "We're going down! Hang on!"

She leant forward and covered her head, Auto's avatar disappearing into her suit, both of them praying they would make it through the crash.

Outside, the craft began to heat up as it collided with the atmosphere of Sanghelios, the amount of friction between the two rising greatly. Very quickly as the craft shot down further and further into the atmosphere towards the surface, fire began to shoot out of the end, it rising greatly to the point that it looked like a kind of comet coming in for an impact on the planet, only this time, unless anyone happened to be on the ground of impact, only two would be lost rather than an entire, or at least an huge swath, of a species.

Down and down the longsword fighter descended, quickly disappearing into a cloud layer, cutting a hole right through it. Parts of the craft began to break off. The engines fell off to the ground, nothing but burning wrecks, the wings were splitting apart like toothpicks,

the craft was literally falling apart, and only a few miles from the ground and it was edging towards it at terrific speed.

Moments later, the ground came into full view and the fighter smashed through the tops of several jungle trees, ripping off the wings and launching pieces of them and other parts of the craft in all directions. Then, with an almighty crash, the fighter smashed into the ground, driving deep into it, smashing the cockpit windows and pulling off the parts of the fighter around the window.

It looked like nobody could survive a crash like that.

Out of the undergrowth, several large figures walked out dressed in robes, though some were dressed in thick armour. Quickly, they descended onto the craft to investigate the origin of it and if those inside it were alive or not.

## 11. An old friend

"Uuuugghh!"

Water sliding down her face was the first thing Eve felt when she began to regain consciousness. Her eyes flickered and a moan passed her lips. Her hand went up to her head and touched her temple. A banging pain from flaring from there and she was sure that she could feel a wet cut, though whether it was due to blood or the water that was on her head she did n-wait! Water?

Her eyes shot open and flattened against her head, wetting her hand even more. How was water getting on her head? More importantly, as she sat up looked down she realised that she was lying on a kind of soft bed made out of green sheets that looked to be from leaves and a kind of cloth that felt like silk. Where was she? In fact, how did she even get here?

It was then she began to notice something else. Her eyes looked up at little and saw a small pile of cloth on the floor in the formation of a dress or robe, it being the colours of gold in a kind of ring around the bottom and black upwards from there and around where the torso and arms were to which they ended by more gold rings around where the holes for the neck and arms were. The black coloured parts of the clothing were dotted with red/gold and yellow markings that to Eve resembled strange diamonds, stripes and strange circular markings that made her think back to the Forerunner markings she had seen on the Halo rings and the Ark. It was amazing to see clothing like that and it made her curious.

Unfortunately, it was what was in the robes that quickly changed the look in her eyes from curiosity and amazement to shock and fear. Inside them was a creature with a reptilian like face on a long head that was attached to a thin neck that seemed too small for the robes. The arms, hands, which had two long middle fingers and two small fingers, neck and head were all grey as of the life had been sucked out of it. Two yellow eyes looked back at her with a kind of warmth and relief in them. The creature was about the same height as her. As Eve met its eyes, her breath was caught in her throat. It was not hard to tell that she had never seen anything like this creature before.



"Do not be afraid, my child," the creature said reassuringly in a feminine voice, telling Eve what gender the creature was. "You are safe," she added, the slit that was her mouth moving as she spoke.

"W-who-who are you?" Eve stuttered nervously.

"My name is Zuka Shanmee," she extended her hand. "You are a Human, aren't you?"

Eve nodded slowly, slowly relaxing, though keeping her guard up in case something suddenly happened. She draped her legs over the edge of the bed but they dangled just above the floor that was completely made of stone. Zuka looked at her, as if expecting her to begin asking questions.

"Umâ€|where am I?" Eve asked her, looking up at Zuka, staring into her yellow eyes.

"You are in one of many villages scattered throughout the jungle, my child," Zuka replied, motioning her hands to the large oval shaped window that looked out to several tall, oval shaped, stone structures that had patterns of red, yellow and orange around the outside walls of the buildings. From what Eve could see, they were scattered about all over the area in the area where their building was and in the distance behind them was nothing but jungle. "This Sactra, near the Wasteland," she added.

"Oh," was Eve's reply. A pause hung between them for a moment before she continued. "Wellâ€|thank you." Another pause. "Umâ€|can I ask you something?"

Zuka nodded. "Of course,"

"Where is my fighter?"

"You would have to ask our village councillor when he returns. I will say, though, your ship crashing in the middle of a swamp did give us quite a scare. For all we knew, we believed you were a Brute ship,"

Eve looked up at her. Of course, now she remembered! She had been shot down by Brutesâ€|or at least she thought she did until...

"Soâ€|thenâ€|you're a female Sangheili?" she asked Zuka, a little shocked.

She nodded. "That is correct," she replied. "I know you are a Human, butâ€|I do not know your name,"

"Oh, heh, sorry," Eve gave a small laugh and extended her hand towards Zuka's. "My name is Evelyn. Evelyn Knight, but I'm usually called Eve,"

They shook. "Well, it is nice to meet you, Evelyn," and they released their hands.

At that moment, a small purple light erupted from her shoulder and both she and Zuka looked to see Auto's avatar standing there, looking

dazed and shattered as if he had just arrived home from a long journey.

"Oooohh!" he groaned, rubbing his eyes. "Talk about being knocked out," he looked up at Eve and then at the surroundings. "Where are we?" he asked Eve.

"In a small Sangheili village," Eve told him.

"A Sangheili village?!" he exclaimed, looking back at her with a look of surprise etched across his face. "Then, wait a minute, how did we even get here? Surely they would haveâ€¦"

"-Yes, we did find you," he heard another feminine voice interrupt him and he looked in the direction of it to see Zuka standing there, her yellow eyes staring at him. Just like Eve's reaction, Auto's eyes went as wide as dinner plates, no doubt he was \_really \_shocked to see a female Sangheili standing \_right in front of him\_. "A-Areâ€¦are you aâ€¦f-female-" he stuttered, still unable to comprehend it, but Zuka cut him off.

"Yes, I am a female Sangheili," she answered him with a nod of her head. "I must say, it is amazing to see an avatar of a Human. I have heard much about you from what our warriors told us in the war,"

Auto gave a small sigh and a nod with a smile and motioned towards Eve. "If you've heard of me, then what about Eve?" he asked.

"Ah, yes! Your white uniform does sound familiar to my ears. What exactly was it you were said to have done in the war, Evelyn?" Zuka asked her, walking over to the bed and sitting down next to her; Eve moving to give her room.

"Well, to make a long story short, I'm the so called 'demon' to the Covenant," she explained. "I'm the one who destroyed the Halo rings and prevented this Great Journey Truth and all the other Prophets wanted to pursue andâ€¦" she shrugged. "I was basically the most hated in the Covenant," she gave a slight laugh but it ended abruptly when she saw a sad look on Zuka's face.

"Are you alright, Zuka?" Eve asked her.

She nodded slightly and tried to force even a small smile onto her face, but it was difficult in doing so.

"Oh, yes. I am fine," she replied. "I am justâ€¦" she heaved a heavy sigh. "That creature, Truth, the one who lead us astray, heâ€¦" she trailed off, pausing for a moment as if trying to word it all, but from Eve and Auto could see, she was biting her lower lip, telling them that she knew well what she wanted to say, but it was going to be hard doing so. "He killed my husband," she muttered lowly, but loud enough for Eve and Auto to hear her.

"Oh," Eve said, looking down at the floor momentarily. "I'm sorry," she muttered sadly.

"It is fine," Zuka replied, trying to brighten up and looked back at Eve. "He was murdered in the Schism. I am sure you have heard of it?" she inquired, looking up at them.

Both Eve and Auto nodded. "Oh, boy, didn't we know it," he said, folding his arms and leaning against the side of Eve's head. "It almost killed us at several points, but we managed to survive better than the Elites-

"Auto!" Eve hissed sharply, giving a quick move of her shoulder to shut him up, which almost made him fall off had he not grabbed hold of a lock of her silver hair. "Sorry, he didn't mean that." Eve apologized to Zuka.

She nodded. "It is fine," a pause as she looked back ahead of her out of the window and sighed. "As I was saying, he was killed by the Brutes on the Sacred Ring built by our gods. Truth had ordered his death personally because he had had a grudge against him for some time," she sighed heavily and looked on sadly. "I miss him,"

A sad look etched its way across Eve's face. Though she herself had never lost a husband or brother herself, she knew what it was like to lose someone close to her. Her parents had died before the war and most of her friends had been killed during it. Though despite all of that, plus seeing many others be killed during the war, she still felt sad whenever someone had lost a family member to theirs, even if it was the husband to an Sangheili Elite, whose species she had once come to despise so long ago.

"I'm sorry, Zuka," she said again sadly to her. "I know how you feel. Same thing happened to me in the war,"

"What? You lost your husband as well?" she inquired.

Eve shook her head. "No, not my husband," and she explained to her about the deaths of her friends. Whilst she listened, Zuka went wide-eyed a couple of times and even gasped at one point. Auto chimed in a few times with his comments as well.

"I cannot imagine that for you, Evelyn," she said to her, shock filling her voice. "I must say, that is very surprising for me to see that you have lost many of your loved ones and yet you have come here strong,"

"Not really strong," Eve muttered, looking back down at the floor. "I still suffer painfully without them. To be honest I-I-I just..." she sighed. "Oh, I don't know I just think there's nothing you can do, besides sitting here mourning it and letting yourself waste away and I didn't want that, but..." a pause as she collected her thoughts. "It was hard doing so,"

Zuka nodded but at that moment a question popped into her head.

"May I ask you: why are you here, Evelyn?" she asked her curiously.

Eve looked up at her and opened her mouth to reply when a set of drapery covering a doorway on the right side of the room, which Eve and Auto only just noticed, and a tiny creature ambled in. It was small, about three and a half to five feet tall, with a dark grey head that looked like it was mutated. Its eyes were a black and red bead-like colour. A small pig snout-like nostril was below the eyes and an oval shaped mouth with sharp teeth was below the snout. It's

skin was like elephants and hung loosely over It's skeleton, making it baggy, and was covered with thick scales. The creature's hands were the size of Human's head and they had only four fingers on each hand, comprising of one thumb and three middle fingers. The legs were like elephants with iguana's toes on them. The creature had bright orange armour on It's chest, shoulders and halfway down It's arm.

"Miss Zuka, the Arbiter is he-" the creature squeaked in a high-pitched voice as it entered, but stopped dead when It's red eyes laid sight on Eve and quickly met with her wide blue eyes. Realisation slipped into both their minds and before anyone could blink, Eve launched herself off the bed and in front of Zuka, pulling off a large branch. The creature screamed: "DEMON! RUN AWAY!" and turned and ran out of the room, waving It's arm around wildly in the air, pushing the cloth aside so fiercely that it was almost torn off the archway.

"No, Evelyn, stop!" Zuka intervened, grabbing her arm as she got up from the bed, worry etching across her face. "There is no need to be alarmed, he's a friend,"

Eve looked at Zuka as if she was completely mad. "What?! What do you mean that Grunt's a friend? He's a member of the Cov-"

"Not any longer actually," a deeper voice said from outside the room and Eve, Auto and Zuka looked over to see the curtain pushed aside once more and another Sangheili walk in, though this one was dressed in silver armour that covered the torso, upper legs, arms and hands and had a pointed end, similar to the beak of an eagle. Upon seeing the Elite, Eve dropped the stick in her hand, both her mouth and Auto's mouth dropping open in surprise, standing there agape at the Elite in front of them. It was Arbiter. "It is good to see you again, Evelyn," he greeted them, laughing a little at their shocked expressions as he entered.

For a moment, Eve struggled to talk. Her mind was racing as if it were in a marathon. How was the Arbiter here? How did he find her? What really shocked her was that he was alive, even though Vadumee had been talking to her about him just a day earlier, but Eve and Auto knew very well that a lot could happen in that time, particularly on a world at war.

"You know each other, Arbiter?" Zuka inquired friendly, walking up to him and glancing at Eve and Auto.

He nodded. "Yes, they fought with me in the war," he told her and stepped forward and held up his hand. Eve looked at it for a moment as if unsure what to do but took it and shook it. "That was quite an entrance you made earlier, Evelyn," he said to her as they released each other's hands. "When the search party said they had recovered a Human with silver hair and dressed in white, I immediately rushed here as quickly as I could,"

She nodded and gave a small smile. "Wellâ€¦you know me, Arbiter. Always have a talent for survival," she replied.

He chuckled. "That's true, that is very true. I apologize for the fighters. For all we knew, we believed you were a Brute ship,"

"Well, It's obvious now we're not," Auto piped up with sarcasm in his voice. "Could have at least contacted us!"

The Arbiter gave him an annoyed look. "Still holding sarcasm within your construct," he replied with a laugh. "No changes in either of you, and that's good," he turned and looked towards the curtain. "I apologize for the Grunt. They are still jumpy as they used to be years ago,"

"Why is he here anyway?" Eve asked the Arbiter, confused. "I thought we hated each other,"

"Wellâ€¦you are correct there, Evelyn," the Elite answered. "You see, when the Covenant split up, there were several groups that still wanted to continue the fight, some for the continuation of the Great Journey, others against it. Surprisingly, as you may find this, which we did, there are more fighting for us rather than against us,"

"Is this because of the treatment they've gotten during and after the war?" Auto asked.

"Yes. The Brutes still threaten them with death. We, ironically, do the same thing, though at the end we have promised them freedom, butâ€¦" he sighed. "That was several years ago and we are still fighting, but we can at least be lucky that the Grunts are not really ones for rebelling. Past history of the Covenant has revealed that to us,"

"Are there others? Fighting with you or the Brutes, I mean?" Eve inquired, though her voice was easily hoping for a no.

"Wellâ€¦" the Arbiter began, pausing for a moment in trying to word this correctly and gather his thoughts. For most of the last few months he had been fighting just Brutes, not really any other races that were fighting for them, so it was difficult to remember who was on whose side. "For our side, it is just us-" he gestured to himself, meaning that the 'us' he was referring about was the Elites. "And the Grunts. For the Brutes, it is them, several Grunts and has been reported that several Jackals and/or Drones have been involved on their side as well. Butâ€¦the majority of the Grunts want nothing more to do with conflict, the Drones have decided not to get involved, Jackals have gone back to pirate raiding, the Hunters have also closed themselves off and the San Shyuum, if there are any left as many were killed by the Flood on High Charity, will not get involved. Though, I do think you Humans will be drawn into this quite quickly," he concluded, gesturing his hand at Eve and Auto on his last sentence.

Upon those last words, though, a worried expression came across Eve's face and she looked down at the ground, biting her upper lip. Auto looked nervously sideways at the wall. The Arbiter noticed their nervous expressions and opened his mouth to ask them what was wrong but noises from outside the room, followed by a nervous sounding high-pitched voice, stopped him.

"I shall go and calm him down," Zuka said to the Arbiter and left the room, leaving the three alone.

The Arbiter looked back at them. "What exactly was wrong just then?"

he asked them, a firm tone in his voice as if he was a parent wanting an answer from their child.

Eve fiddled with her hands and, for a moment, could not face him, but plucked up the courage after a moment and looked back up at him.

"A-About me and Auto and Humanity getting involved," she told him nervously. "There's a slight problem with that,"

12. Off to find him

**\*\*Two hours later\*\***

When Eve had been told of the wasteland by Zuka, she thought it would look like some kind of war torn landscape where nothing grows, everything is destroyed from the jungles to destroyed villages and temples and such and where there were many dead. That was the way she had been brought up to think of wastelands, and the last year of the war years ago had also helped out with that.

To her surprise, the wasteland was just a nickname for an area of this huge part of the jungle in which the Elites had lost to the Brutes months ago. Apart from the tiny pockets of the jungle that had been destroyed, one of the rivers that ran through this area being dried up and one or two villages that were dotted around the 'wasteland zone' having been abandoned and/or partly destroyed, the wasteland was really not what she had thought it to be. In fact, it barely looked as if the war had hit it at all. The jungle still dominated the landscape and were it not for the small clearings that were filled with crates, flying ships and Elites walking to and from these cleared areas, it would look like some normal rainforest you would see on Earth.

That was exactly what she was thinking as she looked out from the opening on the side of the green coloured phantom as it descended towards one of these clearings. They had been on the move for the past hour and for the last ten minutes she had leant against the wall of the interior of the craft next to the opening, watching the landscape race by almost like a blue below the now lime green coloured sky. It was coming towards midday and the Arbiter had told her that this is what happened when that time of day reached Sanghelios when it was not raining.

Speaking of the Arbiter, things had, surprisingly, been quite fine between Eve and the Arbiter since they had left the village. After she had explained to him why she and Auto had actually come to his home world, he had questioned her for doing something and why he needed someone like her to help him and his people in their struggle against a common enemy, but after a while though he suddenly decided to go ahead with her and Auto in their mission to find Wally. They had left for the nearest hanger, boarded the next phantom andâ€|well, they were just about to land at the designated landing zone. Privately, though, Eve did feel quite suspicious about this, but she was too focused on Wally for the moment to worry about anything else. She had to find him and bring him home to safety, though that was providing he was here or at least somewhere nearby.

The phantom slowed down as it neared the ground, several Elites

moving out of the way to provide space. It stopped about ten feet above the ground and hovered there momentarily until it lowered the last few feet to the ground, stopping only about five feet above it. The side of the craft opened up, revealing the large main room inside, and Eve and several other Elites dressed in blue armour stepped down onto the ground, the warmth of the swampy air embracing her tightly, perspiration quickly forming on her forehead.

"Jeez, It's hot here!" she commented, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. "Makes Earth's jungles feel like a freezer,"

"You'll get used to it, Evelyn," a voice from behind her said.

She looked over her shoulder to see the Arbiter step down from the phantom to the ground, a plasma rifle in his hand. He had been in the bridge for most of the trip here, his excuse being that he was contacting the base to let them know that they were on their way back and they had Eve with them. Now he was going to take her and Auto to the frontline where the fighting usually took place.

As the phantom hovered back up into the air, the side of it closing again, Eve began to notice the attention she was drawing from the Elites and the few Grunts who were scattered about amongst the clearing and on small paths that led into the jungle, no doubt that they were surprised to see her here. She did feel like someone they were muttering about her presence not being wanted for the obvious reasons years ago and, despite everything that happened back then, the Arbiter had warned her that there were to be a few who were not really going to enjoy the prospect of a Human coming here to their home world. To be honest, though, Eve could not really care less about their feelings for her. She and Auto were here for one thing and they were going to go on with it, even if the whole planet, original inhabitants or invaders, were going to be out to try and kill her.

"Is everyone here?" the Arbiter inquired to the surrounding group that had just gotten off the phantom, which, with a loud humming sound, disappeared overhead behind the tree line. They all replied with a "Yes, sir," or a nod. "Very well," he continued, turning his head to look at Eve. "Follow us, Evelyn,"

He ran off towards one of the paths that exited the clearing from the right side, the Elites and Eve following close behind. Very quickly, they were engulfed by the sudden darkness under the undergrowth of the jungle trees above as if they had entered some dark realm where the light barely got through to the ground below. Along this path, scattered in small groups or individually, were several more Elites and Grunts, whose eyes were fixed on Eve the moment they saw her. Whispering filled both her ears either side of her. Auto's avatar appeared on her shoulder and he watched the soldiers along the sides of the path go by.

"You've really drawn a crowd, Eve," he whispered to her, motioning towards them.

"I had a feeling I would," she replied, also whispering, moving her eyes up to look at those on the sides of the path.

She could see that there were many different emotions among the Elites and Grunts they passed. Some of them, predominantly Elites, were quite glad that she had come here, others though were apprehensive, particularly the Grunts, who quickly backed away when they saw her, and one or two were unhappy that she had come here, which she could see by the glares in their eyes despite their helmets covering most of their faces. It looked like the Arbiter was right after all, not everyone was going to be happy she was here.

They went on for about another ten minutes or so, having to wrestle through a gradually thickening layer of undergrowth that seemed to wrap itself around you as if it were trying to swallow you up. Even the path became difficult for Eve to keep track of. If it was not for the Elites in front of her, she would have surely gotten lost despite being only a few hundred feet from the landing zone. Despite being on an extra-terrestrial world, this was beginning to feel much like any normal jungle trek, just with a battle suit, an avatar and no weapons.

The latter thought quickly stuck in Eve's mind. She had only just realised. \_I'm going to have to find one at this base of theirs \_she thought to herself.

On and on they walked, pushing through more leaves, bushes and going around thick trees. Then, as if they had broken through some kind of barrier, they suddenly burst out of the undergrowth and into a clearing, but rather than be a circular one like the landing zone, this one was more of a rectangular shape, was about forty or so feet wide and zigzagged in and out of the trees and undergrowth. What really stuck out about this clearing though was that the ground was filled with a deep trench with small dugout positions, steps leading up to the ground and the sides were covered with wooden boards and branches and such gathered from the surrounding jungle to hold back the earth and prevent it from caving in. Several Elites were dotted along the trench and so were a few Grunts. Some were keeping watch whilst others were talking amongst themselves or patrolling up and down the trench.

As the group emerged from the undergrowth, one of the Grunts keeping watch heard them and turned his head.

"Praise, mighty Arbiter is here!" he squeaked happily, his eyes searching the group. "He will deliver us to vic-" It was then he stopped dead when his eyes fell on Eve. She stared back at him and raised her hand as if to say 'hi'. "AAAAHHHHH! Demon! The demon is here! RUN AWAY!" he screamed, jumping away in fear so quickly that he lost his footing as they made contact with the ground again and fell down into the trench with a thud.

Everyone that was in view up and down the trench turned to see why the Grunt was panicking and saw Eve standing next to the trench. Just like what had happened on the path, she was greeted with whispering and muttering from the Elites and a few cries of terror from the Grunt (the one who had seen her had run off down the trench, to the displeasure of the Elite standing near him.)

"The rest of you head off to your positions," the Arbiter said to the Elites. They nodded and headed off, some of them muttering amongst themselves or to others about Eve being here. "Come, Evelyn," the Elite commander said to her, motioning her to follow him as he



stepped into the trench.

Deciding it was best not to hesitate; she quickly rushed over to the Arbiter and followed him closely into the trench. She felt like she would be safer if she was closer to him. As they passed between the Elites, most of them wearing blue armour to signal they were minors, and Grunts either side of them, the whispers from them reached her ears and all eyes followed her. She felt uncomfortable with all the eyes of those in the trench on her, like she was a deer having a nervous feeling it was being watched by a lion or cheetah on the savannah.

"Are you okay?" Auto asked her.

"I'm just a little nervous about being in the middle of this Elite army," she replied, whispering as she followed the Arbiter around a bend in the trench. "It's obvious that some of them don't want us here,"

Auto nodded a little as they approached another two Elites, both of them wearing silver armour, that were lying down on the parapet above the trench. They looked over their shoulders and saw Eve and, like the others, quickly broke into whispering, quickly sitting up to watch her disappear behind a small batch of undergrowth on the ground to the right of the trench. They were both shocked to actually see a \_Human here on their home world! \_Eve looked back over her shoulder at them, noticing again, as she had done with the Elites wearing blue armour earlier, that they were using the same weaponry and uniform standards as they had in the war. She also noticed that these two silver armoured Elites were holding Covenant carbine rifles, signifying their rank as snipers, just like they would have been assigned to do in the old Covenant system. Even though some of the Elites would still not be happy to see her, she was amazed to see that they were still following that hierarchy despite it being part of what had nearly destroyed the Elites and those who remained on their side during the schism.

After about five minutes or so of walking and manoeuvring around other soldiers in the trench system, the Arbiter stopped them and pointed ahead, looking over his shoulder at Eve.

"There is our headquarters, Evelyn," Arbiter told her, moving aside to allow her to look.

Eve and Auto took in the large stone building about twenty five feet in front of them. It was a large cube shaped building where the trench stopped next to the wall where an open doorway was. On the top of the building was a small circular shade turret emplacement with the barrels of the guns facing out into the undergrowth to the right and a Grunt in red armour was piloting it. Voices were emanating out from inside the building, obviously meaning there were other Elites inside it.

"Wellâ€¦|looks formidable," she commented.

He nodded. "Made out of some of the hardest forms of stone this side of Sanghelios," he explained to her as they resumed walking on into the structure, revealing a dimly lit space with the only source of light coming from a large rectangular window on the right wall. "It has been our headquarters here for some time now. We were only just

able to take it back after the Brutes captured it when they launched an offensive several season months earlier."

He stopped, almost making Eve slam into him, and looked out at the building's exit about twenty feet ahead of them that led out into a continuing section of the trench where more Elites and Grunts were standing guard or mooching about, waiting to see what might happen, or \_if \_anything happened at all.

"Many of my kind died trying to hold this building," the Arbiter said in a low and sad tone. "And even more so when we had to retake it from the Brutes,"

Eve and Auto hung on every word andâ€¦to be honest they were just shocked. Even though they had heard, from several Elites back at the base or on the phantom and from Vadumee when he came to Earth the other day, that the war against the Brutes was going badly for the Elites, they were just shocked to see just \_how bad \_it actually was! Despite being in the same position many times before years ago in the war with the Covenant, it was still hard for them to comprehend the fact that the Elites, who were the virtual backbone and overall might of that coalition were now being worn down and were losing!

After a few moments, the Arbiter snapped out of his trance and turned to face Eve. "Come, follow me," he told her and went left.

At first glance, Eve and Auto thought he had just walked through a wall, but a second look told their eyes that there was a doorway on the wall, the light coming in through the window having not really illuminated very well. They followed him into a dark tunnel that seemed to stretch on forever into pitch blackness for a moment until their eyes adjusted to the darkness. They fell on a faint light at the end of the corridor emanating from a room to the left, some fifteen feet from where Eve and Auto were. For a brief moment, the light was blocked out by the silhouette of a large figure. The Arbiter. He stopped and, from what Eve could suggest, looked down the corridor at them.

"Come, Evelyn," he called. "There are people here who will need to meet you,"

Looking at Auto, she shrugged and walked down the corridor to the room. As she approached, she heard voices coming from the room, all of them sounding deep, meaning they were Elites. She heard them stop talking and another voice, which she quickly recognized as the Arbiter's, greet them. When she reached the doorway, she was greeted with a small dank, dimly lit room with no windows so it was much hotter in here. In the middle of the room was a small wooden table with several Elites gathered around it. The Arbiter stood ahead of Eve and was looking over his shoulder at her. With him were three others: one of them in silver armour, the other two in red, all of them hunched over the table where a map of the area of the planet was placed. All of them were looking at her as if waiting for her to greet herself. She could see the shock in their eyes, but she was not really that surprised by it. Virtually everyone had been goggling at her since she arrived.

"Evelyn," the silver armoured Elite said standing on the right side of the table said, stepping towards her into the light coming from a small hole in the ceiling.

It was Vadumee. He seemed the most surprised of the all the Elites in the room, which Eve did expect after the argument they had when he came to Earth. He even lost the words he wanted to say in his mouth, his eyes not leaving her.

"I-Iâ€¦|did notâ€¦|expect you to be here," he said.

"To be honest, neither did I," she replied quietly. "Untilâ€¦|well, I had a dream and I had to come here,"

"Well," Vadumee straightened up and cleared his throat. "This dream of yours has made you see the correct path. We are glad to have you here fighting by our side, Evelyn. Come," he walked back over to the table. "We have much planning for you,"

"But we have not even set out an outline of-" one of the red Elites said, but Vadumee shot him a dark glare, which promptly silenced him.

Eve eyed him suspiciously and looked at the Arbiter, who also looked a little concerned about Vadumee's sudden silencing of another Elite, though for a completely different reason. She was getting the feeling like they were not telling her something, something that she ought to know. But before she could even open her mouth to interject they cut her off.

"Evelyn, come and look. We have a planned strategy of attack on the Brutes," Vadumee said.

"B-but Vadumee-" Eve tried to say, but he stopped her and continued explaining his plan.

"We shall launch a two pronged attack and a main central thrust-"

"Vadumee, I need to tell you-"

"It will catch them completely by surprise and we can drive them away from this area-"

By this point, Eve sighed and shouted out "Vadumee!" which silenced him and made him look over his shoulder at her with wide-eyes as if he realised she was still standing there.

"Look, Vadumee, I'm sure your \_plan \_will be good, but I'm not here to fight a war," she told him. To her expectancy a shocked look, though not really as bad as she expected, etched across his face; the other two Elites also looking quite surprised as well.

Vadumee's eyes glanced momentarily at the Arbiter and then back to Eve. "W-why not?" he asked her, a demanding tone in his voice, his whole body now turning to face her.

"Because I'm here to find Wally," she answered and it was upon hearing that name that the Elites all gave each other worried looks, which Eve quickly noticed and became alert like a guard dog picking up an intruder. "What! What is it?! Why do you all look scared?"

For a moment, none answered her. They were finding it hard to tell

Eve what happened to her friend and the possibility that he was no longer here on the planet. At least, in the living sense.

Finally, after about ten seconds, the Arbiter cleared his throat. "Wellâ€|Evelyn," he began, his mind finding it difficult to properly word this without worrying her. "Thisâ€|this is not going to be easy telling you this, butâ€|" he glanced at Vadumee and the other two Elites, as if looking to them for help, and then back at Eve and heaved a heavy sigh. "He is gone,"

Those words hit Eve like a sledgehammer. Her mouth opened agape slightly, her eyes widened, her mind went blank. What! H-he was gone! W-w-what did they mean by that?

"W-what do you guys mean?" she asked worryingly, her mind reverting to the worst possible conclusion of her friend. "Isâ€|is heâ€|"

"We do not know," Vadumee intervened, which did save the Arbiter of having to admit it himself. "You see, Evelyn, we were attacked some time ago, I cannot remember exactly how long it had been. But a small group of minors under the leadership of a major and all of them under the Oracle's guidance were in the jungle several miles from here when they were attacked. All but two of the minors were killed and the survivors came back here and told us what had happened to them. They both said that the Oracle was missing and presumably dead. It has been some time now and although neither I nor the Arbiter believed them at first, it is likely that the Brutes have taken his life,"

Eve shook her head in disbelief. Her heart had virtually stopped as if unable to cope with the possibility that the one reason she had come here for, the man she loved and cherished, wasâ€|was gone.

"No!" she whispered deeply, shaking her head and looking down at the floor. "He can't be! He can't be dead! I mean what about his bodysuit and his anti-gravity boots? Surely he must have some lead on him,"

"Evelyn, we sent word to all of our forces to be on the lookout for the Oracle following the attack and even if he had escaped, he would have come straight back to us, but he did not, and no one reported him coming back. It has been many weeks and we still have nothing, no lead on him whatsoever,"

"Thenâ€|then maybe he got lost," Eve suggested, frantically trying to find an alternative to his state.

The Arbiter shook his head. "It is impossible, Evelyn. He knows much of the planet very well. It is unlikely that has happened to him and the area he was last seen in has since been retaken by our forces. They found no body, though,"

Eve's eyes lit up a little when she heard this, a glint of hope twinkling inside them. "Then there's a chance he's still alive!"

"Unless the Brutes moved his body," Vadumee took over the conversation. "But if he is alive, the likelihood is that he had been taken prisoner. Apart from him being dead, it is the only other

assumption to his whereabouts,"

Eve's heart sank a little when she heard this, but it still remained strong. If he was alive and being held prisoner, then they had to act!

"Then we have to find him and save him!" she told them firmly. "He might need us!"

"It is possible," Vadumee replied. His tone, however, was also beginning to turn a little firm as well. "But Evelyn, you must see the reality of this predicament! Even if he is alive, we have no way of finding him and even if we do, the Brutes are likely to hamper any rescue attempt we might make to free him!" her face fell when he told her this, but he kept his firm expression on his. "I am sorry, Evelyn, but unless there is an opportunity, which I highly doubt, we will not be saving him,"

She could not believe what she was hearing! It was unfair, it was so unfair! They could not just stand by and leave Wally at the hands of the Brutes. For all they knew, they might be torturing him or slowly killing him at this moment or doing all sorts of horrible things to him. There had to be something they could do to save him! Just standing here made her heart ache.

Then a sense of firmness and anger really struck. She was furious that the Elites were unwilling to help her rescue someone who had helped them survive complete destruction years ago and had been ever since! It was unfair to him, but if they were not going to help him then she would.

"Then I'll go on my own," she announced.

At this, all eyes, even those of Auto, who had remained completely silent through the conversation so far, looked at her with expressions as if she was mad. In a way, though, she was. After all, she had never been to Sanghelios and he was in an area crawling with Brutes, Jackals and others who were still loyal to the Covenant cause. If she was to go out and try and find Wally on her own, she would never come back alive.

"Evelyn, it is suicidal," the Arbiter said to her, trying to sound like he wanted her to see reason.

"Well, I'm willing to risk that," she replied firmly. "I came here for him, and I'm not leaving until I have him, and I'll die trying,"

"Um...Eve, I hope you really are seeing sense here," Auto piped up nervously, only to be met with a dark glare from her.

"Auto, what are you saying?!" she snapped at him angrily.

"Wellâ€¦don't you think you're going a little crazy here?" he told her. "I mean, I'm all for rescuing him, but we can't just go running off into the jungle. \_We \_might get lost there. Plus, if he was captured, we don't even know if he's alive,"

"Auto, I'm willing to risk it, and quite frankly, I thought you were

as well!" she said, frustration in her voice. She sighed and looked at him and the Elites. "I thought you all would help! I thought I could rely on you!" she paused as if letting her disgust of their lack of commitment sink into them. "I guess I was wrong,"

She half-turned to leave the room, but the Arbiter stopped her. "Wait!" She paused in the doorway and looked back at him with an annoyed expression. The Elite stepped towards her. "I will go with you," he said.

She looked at him for a moment, studying his face as if to try and see if he was serious about what he had just told her. He looked back at her with a sense of firmness in his eyes, but within them he still held the reality that this mission was suicidal. The other three Elites, meanwhile, were completely taken by surprise by his decision, but, like Eve, it was going to be hard to convince him otherwise.

"Wellâ€¦thanks, Arbiter," she replied, a little relieved that someone had seen sense. "Butâ€¦why are you suddenly agreeing to come with me?"

"Evelyn, I know for a fact that it will be extremely difficult to discourage you from your objective," he replied. "Besides, even though I still think this is mad of you, it is dangerous for you to go out there on your own when there is danger lurking about. It is better if I come with you,"

Auto whistled. "Wow, and I thought only she was mad," he commented.

They ignored him and Vadumee stepped forward. "Very well, Arbiter," he said. "But before you two leave, where do you plan to begin your search?" he inquired.

"The old temple ruins to the east of here," the Arbiter answered, glancing at Vadumee and looking back at Eve, who had a confused look on her face about why they were going there. "It is a Brute stronghold and they will likely have prisoners there. The oracle could be among them,"

Eve smiled a little. Perfect! They were finally going to free Wally, and they knew where they were going. Oh, it was all fitting together! She could not wait to see him again! Soon he would free!

"Very well," Vadumee piped up and placed his arm with a fisted hand across diagonally across his chest. "Good luck to you both,"

The Arbiter replied with the same motion of movement. "Thank you," he replied and turned back to Eve. "Let us take some weapons first before we set off. It is likely we will run into Brutes and other Loyalists on the way there,"

### 13. Into the Temple

**\*\*One hour later\*\***

Deep within the jungle of Sanghelios, the noise of undergrowth being pushed aside, cut and pulled apart filled the air. Leaves fell from

the trees and crunched under the feet of the two beings moving through the jungle, branches snapped as they pushed them aside, their feet even splashed occasionally when they hit a small puddle of water when it had rained earlier. The air was filled with humidity that seemed to settle and it felt like an oven, so much so that Eve was beginning to sweat a little as she tore through another part of the undergrowth of a bush with a flick of her energy sword, but ignored the liquid body waste as if it were not even there. The Arbiter was following close behind, trying to keep up her fast moving pace.

Ever since they had set off earlier, Eve and the Arbiter, now armed with an energy sword and a plasma rifle each, with Eve also holding a solar flare as well, the two had barely stopped, mostly because Eve was unwilling to as her mind was set firmly on finding and freeing Wally, regardless of whatever danger they would face on the way there. The Arbiter, who had been leading her in the direction of the temple, was beginning to question if she was actually sane at this particular moment in time. He thought over the possibility of whether he could try and reason with her and make her see sense and not to go running directly into a potentially dangerous area, but he was quick to remind himself that when someone like Eve was firmly set on something, especially if it was rescuing a friend, then it was going to be nearly impossible to make her change her mind, let alone see some sense.

As they cut through another load of vines hanging down from the trees like tentacles, Eve failed to notice a small log by her foot, which she hit and caused to lose her balance and fall flat on her face with a yell.

"Evelyn!" the Arbiter exclaimed as he quickly rushed over and knelt down. "Are you alright?"

She groaned in reply and picked herself up, wiping a bit of dirt off her face, and continued on before the Arbiter could even see if there were any marks or cuts or whatever on her face. It was as if he was not even there to her, which did worry him a little. This incessant marching of hers was beginning to go out of control and it was the first sign of her desperation to get on with what she wanted to do. Eventually, if this continued, she would start to become more anxious and therefore go quicker, which would be very bad as she would overstep an obstacle or run headlong into a Brute patrol or ambush. He was going to have to slow her down.

He got up and followed her deeper into the undergrowth, pushing aside a growth of vines that were dangling down from the branches of a tree above. As they walked on, strange noises began to fill the air around them. Eve, as if breaking out of her trance, seemed to notice them as she turned her head and glance up and around the vegetation that surrounded them, a slight sense of nervousness beginning to grow inside her. She had never heard these kinds of noises before. They sounded like low growls mixed with screeches, like the roar of a bear mixed with a monkey screech. Several leaves fell from above and, glancing up, she saw a large shape jump from one branch to another, quickly disappearing into the undergrowth.

"Um, Arbiter?" Eve piped up nervously, looking over her shoulder at him as if noticing he was following her. "Thereâ€|aren't anyâ€|well, dangerous creatures here, are there?" she asked him, concerned.

To her dismay, he nodded at her. "I'm afraid so, Evelyn," he replied in a voice that sounded as if it were regretting having to tell her this. "What you have seen just now-" he motioned with his head up towards the branches and leaves above where Eve had seen the creature disappear into. "-Is a Kodan, much like a species on your home planetâ€¦I last recall it beingâ€¦m-monkeys? Yes, that is it."

"They're not dangerous, are they?" Auto, who had been listening closely from within Eve's shoulder, suddenly piped up; his avatar shooting up to It's seven inch height.

"Not unless you provoke them," the Arbiter answered, quickly walking ahead and swinging his energy sword through the air as if trying to cut it, breaking another set of vines loose; them falling to the ground in a heap. "Though, there areâ€¦other\_creatures in this jungle that may not be very safe to go near,"

Eve and Auto glanced worryingly at each other, both of them really concerned that as well as there being Brutes hiding out in the jungle, along with the possibility of Jackals, Drones and several Grunts, there were now other creatures they had to be on the lookout for. Great! Just like in films, everything on this planet was, at least from a first glance of what they knew already, was harmful and capable of killing. Then again, though, it made them think back to Earth. Even though it was not necessarily a jungle like Sanghelios here was, but it still held a deadly reputation for itself and all life that lived on it; and that was just without including Humans!

There was one thing, though, that Eve was proud of. Here on Sanghelios, the Elites only had to deal with one system of climate, at least in the sense of an overwhelming majority of the planet, and so she would expect one group of problems rather than different groups of obstacles. However, that was providing that Sanghelios' jungle still acted the same way an Earth jungle would.

As the three pushed deeper and deeper into the undergrowth, their energy swords slicing through the vegetation around them, the Arbiter suddenly stopped in his tracks and held up his hand; signalling Eve to do the same, which she did.

"What is it?" she asked.

The Arbiter sniffed the air loudly through the beak-like part of his helmet, the scent overwhelming his nostrils almost as if it were a type of poison. Grimacing at the smell, he looked back to Eve.

"The scent, It's horrible!" he breathed out, struggling to do so.

Eve smelled the air and almost at once she too was hit by it as if she had struck a brick wall. Clapping a hand over her mouth and nose, she coughed heavily. The Elite was right! It smelt likeâ€¦like death! Pure death; as if there was a rotting corpse in the worst stages of advanced decomposition lying on the ground next to them!

"Oh God! What the hell is that?!" she exclaimed, muffled by her hand.



"I do not know!" the Arbiter replied; his voice sounding a little wheezy as he tried to cover as much of his face as possible with his arm to block out the stench. "It is horrible!"

Eve nodded and began scanning the undergrowth around and above them to try and find the source of this horrific stench that just seemed to emanate out of nowhere! The Arbiter did the same, his eyes scanning every inch of the vegetation that he was all too familiar with to the point where he could spot anything different from miles away, but there was nothing, nothing at all! Where was it coming from? More importantly, why was it here, seemingly hovering around them in this part of the jungle?

All of a sudden, as quickly as it came, the stench seemed to disappear into the air, which the two noticed as they lowered their arms and sniffed the air. Both looked at each other, perplexed by what had just happened. Where had it gone?

"Wellâ€¦that wasâ€¦very strange," the Arbiter commented nervously.

Eve nodded in agreement. Somewhere in her mind, however, this sudden new stench wasâ€¦wellâ€¦it was processing it and the source was that it was reminding her of something, but exactly what she could not pinpoint completely. She was definitely certain that she had picked it up before, that was true to her, butâ€¦she just could not remember where.

SNAP! The eyes of the three, all six of them as wide as dinner plates, darted in the direction of a large tree about ten feet from them; their hands gripping their weapons tightly, ready to use them if they needed to. For about ten seconds, they remained still as statues, waiting to see what would happen, but nothing did. Still, they got the feeling that they were being watched. If they were; was it a Brute? A Jackal? A Drone? No way could it be a Grunt. Was it another jungle creature checking them out, or was it something else?

"Wait here," the Arbiter finally said to Eve, breaking the silence that hung in the air; stepping over to the tree with an almost silent pattern in his footfalls; his arm with the energy sword rising slightly so it was in an attack position.

Eve watched with fear as the Arbiter approached the tree, stopped next to it for a moment as if frozen in time, then suddenly moved around it, waving his sword in an attack force. To his surprise, and hers when he told them there was nothing. Absolutely nothing!

"Something must have done that," Eve insisted firmly as the Arbiter walked back over to them. "I mean; that stench just doesn't appear out of thin air like that,"

"Are you sure it wasn't an animal or a plant?" Auto suggested, looking towards the Arbiter, who shook his head.

"I am certain it was not," he replied. "I know every animal species on this world and I would have heard it if it was an animal that then retreated once I came near the tree,"

"Well, I'm not staying in here, let's just go," Eve intervened, quickly to the right away from the area.

The Arbiter quickly followed her so as not to lose her in the undergrowth, almost stumbling several times as his feet hit a few holes hidden by the sprawling vegetation that seemed to be on a determined mission to take over every last bit of revealed earth in the jungle, and possibly even take a few creatures that dwelled upon the surface with it.

"Evelyn, stop!" the Arbiter called out. She did so and turned to face him and at once she saw a kind of seriousness in his eyes; almost as if he was desperate to get her back on the right path. "You are going the wrong way," he told her. "We must go this way to the temple," he pointed east again in a small trail that led through the trees.

"Arbiter, are you sure that's a good idea?" she asked him in a concerned voice, her blue eyes gazing worryingly down where he had pointed. "What if we run into what we might have heard?"

"Then we will be ready for him, or it," he reassured her, though his voice was filled with a firm tone, almost as if he was getting annoyed of her taking so long; but he quickly must have realised this because he placed his hand on her shoulder and his voice became more gentle; sounding more real reassuring. "Do not worry, Evelyn. We will get there and we will find him. Come,"

He walked off down the trail; Eve and Auto watching him with apprehension. She had noticed that he did seem to be rushing her a little and the seriousness she had just seen in his eyes and heard in his tone were telling her something was not right. Auto had noticed it as well and as both looked at each other; they could easily tell they were thinking the same thing. The Arbiter was not telling them something, probably something that they would really need to know. Both looked back at the Arbiter, now about five feet ahead of them with a burning urge to get him to tell them what it was he was not telling them. There had to be! He would not just walk off like this use that sort of a tone on them! He never had done before, so why was he now?

After a few moments, though, they decided against it and Eve followed him down the trail, quickly catching up to him so as not to lose him.

As they moved further into the jungle, they came across a tiny stream that cut through the trees. The noise of the water running down the side of the rocks felt soothing and comforting to Eve as they crossed it, their feet splashing loudly and disturbing the usual flowing pattern of the stream; though it quickly moved to an alternative path and seemed to engulf their footwear in doing so. Eve let out a low, relaxed breath as the warmth of the water, heated by the weather, swept over her foot and up into the rest of her body, it embracing her like a blanket and giving her a sense of comfort in this troubling time for her.

"Stop!" the single word was sharp. Eve halted where she was, on the other side of the stream, suddenly taken out of her warm moment and now energy sword at the ready with her other hand on the plasma rifle on her belt.

"There's something wrong," the Arbiter said.

"What?" Eve inquired.

He paused for moment, his eagle-like eyes searching the undergrowth around them as if he were a camera scanning the area it was in.

"I think we are being watched," he told her in a quiet voice as if not wanting to reveal to whatever it was he feared was following them that they knew of It's presence.

Eve slowly turned her head left and then right, taking in the scene around them. Behind her the steady noise of the stream continued on as if it did not want to become involved in this tense moment. Her blue eyes took in everything and it was then she did have a sense of reality of just how vulnerable they were. The trees were no more than a few feet away from them with thick undergrowth around and above them. What was more, the trail came to an abrupt end so they could very easily, like earlier, wander into a place they wished to avoid. She could see why the Arbiter was worried; there \_could be \_someone, or something, watching them right now.

"Auto!" Eve whispered to him as he was looking tensely over his shoulder at the stream behind them as if afraid it was suddenly going to rise up and engulf them. "Can youâ€¦like do a scan of the area? Just in case there is something here?"

He nodded and quickly disappeared back inside Eve's shoulder. From there she could hear his voice clear in her ears, 'humming' as he scanned the entire region they were in. The Arbiter had decided to deactivate his energy sword and was now wielding his plasma rifle. Eve did the same, though kept her energy sword on her belt, just in case thisâ€¦whatever it was decided to rush out and attack them.

"I don't have anything at the moment," Eve heard Auto say to her. "It's probably just yourâ€¦wait!"

SNAP! It came from in front of them and not even a second passed before Eve and the Arbiter fired a barrage of light blue blasts into the undergrowth; the leaves burning up into shrivels; the branches breaking like matchsticks, the barks of the tree breaking off like bits of plastic. A high-pitched cry echoed out from the undergrowth, and then silence followed.

For a moment, the two were frozen to the spot as if unsure of what to do, which was true in a way but they feared if there were more. Then the Arbiter cautiously moved forward, his weapon raised and finger placed on the trigger, ready to fire if anything else moved. Eve followed close behind him, also keeping her weapon at the ready. The Arbiter pushed aside a part of the bush in front of him with his hand and saw on the ground in front of him the body of a fallen Grunt. Eve came up next to him, her eyes transfixed on it as if unable to believe that they had just killed it.

"Now that really is something that surprised me," she commented as the Arbiter stepped forward towards the body and gave it a slight prod with his foot as if to try and see if it was still alive. Eve scanned the surrounding trees with her eyes. "Wonder if there's any more?" she asked herself.

"Yes, it is strange that this one has appeared by himself," the Arbiter replied as he stepped over the body, his eyes trained on something else ahead of him through the undergrowth.

Whilst the Arbiter was going towards the undergrowth, Eve walked over to the body of the Grunt, her and Auto looking down at it with ease; taking comfort in knowing that he had not succeeded in surprising them, though even if he had they would have easily killed him.

"Wonder why he's out here by himself," Auto muttered, though Eve heard him.

"Probably got lost," she replied with a hint of concern in her voice and again he eyes looked up at the surrounding undergrowth; her arm rising a little to the point where the plasma rifle in her hand was lying against her stomach. "I don't feel extremely comfortable here, I have to say," she added.

"Evelyn! Come here! \_Quickly\_" the Arbiter called over, having gone through the undergrowth and was only just visible over the top of the bushes. "Quickly. We are here!"

Eve stepped over the body and rushed over to his side, pushing aside the bush blocking her path. Her eyes were shocked, just like the expression on her face, when she saw what was before them.

About one hundred feet ahead of them in an enormous clearing was a huge square shaped stone building that was largely in ruins with huge chunks missing out of the sides, the huge stone steps leading up to the floor where the entrance was and the six columns along the front at the top of the steps. Two rectangular wings sections coming off the middle of the sides of the main square section. Large holes dotted the wings, partially revealing the corridors inside them, and the small towers at the end of them; the steephals on the top of the right tower missing from about half-way up. Behind the square section of the building was a wide rectangular section that had a large courtyard in the middle of it with a small platform attached to the length side of the courtyard furthest from the front of the temple. A passageway was located below with a series of mostly broken single stone columns (no particular building order) going around the side of it. Piles of ruins were scattered about around the front of the tower and in the courtyard and over most of it was a series of growing vines and even a few trees were growing out of the temple.

As Eve took in the sight of the building in front of her, she could see that this temple, likely due to the immense damage and that this temple had not been used as a place of worship by the Elites for some time, made her think that it had been fought over. Even so, it still looked like any normal temple ruin, just like those in Central America when she and Auto had landed outside Tikal years ago. It was very reminiscent of the fact that non-natural buildings, no matter how graceful or majestic they were, would eventually be swallowed up by nature.

"This is where he is likely to be," the Arbiter said, glancing momentarily at Eve before looking back at the temple. "Come, let us go find him,"

He ran off ahead of her towards the steps; Eve following right behind him. As they reached the bottom of the steps, the Arbiter running up them with ease to the top, she suddenly stopped, which startled Auto as he had been transfixed on the structure in front of them.

"\_Whoa\_! Eve, are you okay?" he asked her, looking at her with concern.

She did not reply to him but stayed rooted to the spot, her eyes staring ahead at the steps in front of her as if they had her in a trance. Auto tapped her cheek several times with his tiny hand but got no response and it was then he began to worry. Was she alright?

Then, Eve began to slowly turn her head to the right, facing the shoulder where Auto was, and looked behind her at the trees behind them, her blue eyes concentrating onâ€|well whatever it was she was looking at. At the same time as she did, the bushes rustled and something moved back from sight and out of view, disappearing into the undergrowth. Auto looked about a second later but saw nothing, which only worried him further and he clicked his fingers at Eve to try and snap her out of her trance, but to no avail.

"Evelyn! Evelyn!" the Arbiter barked down at her, snapping her out of her trance and she looked back up at him. "Come, we must hurry!"

As if forgetting what had just happened, she ran up the steps and re-joined the Arbiter. Auto, however, looked at her warily as if something was wrong with her, which there probably was. Yet, as they reached the top of the stairs and the Arbiter went on ahead, Eve paused again for the moment and stole another glance back over her shoulder with nervous eyes, which Auto again saw and could see she was clearly disturbed by something, but what?

She ran on inside after the Arbiter, right into the unknown.

#### 14. Telling the truth

Going into an abandoned temple in the middle of enemy territory, slap bang in a jungle that would swallow you up like some kind of monster, was not really what Eve would favour, especially when it was crumbling to pieces like this one but it was very reminiscent to when she had gone into Tikal back on Earth five years ago when the Covenant attacked it. The only differences there were that the Covenant were in the middle of territory that was mostly Human controlled and the temple had been in a more stable condition. Also there had been people there in Tikal who were on her side but now the only ones who were likely to inhabit this heap of ruins were creatures who wanted to kill the Arbiter and her.

\_Come to think of it, the Brutes themselves haven't really seen me yet \_she told herself and added a mental laugh on the end. \_Sure they'll love to see me\_

They approached the large bronze doors, or what was left of them as one had fallen off onto the floor and the other was barely attached to the wall and leaning on one side, and split up and stood against the wall; weapons at the ready.

"Get ready, Evelyn," the Arbiter said to her as he took a step towards the doorway and poked his head around the corner; his eyes scanning every inch of the scene in front of him.

The main foyer was mostly filled with piles of ruins from the ceiling and fallen columns that been standing around the centre of the room in a square shape. Large holes were dotted about in the stone floor and the walls were covered with jungle vines. Even the side of a tree was growing through a huge hole in the right wall next to the corridor that was the wing of that side of the temple; the vines and branches from it covering most of the wall and the parts of the ceiling around the hole where the tree rose up out of the temple. Another large doorway on the opposite end of the foyer led into the rectangular section of the temple's rear and beyond that entrance was likely to be a way out into the courtyard.

For a moment, the Arbiter's eyes remained still as if he had been frozen in time, his eyes taking in everything in the foyer to make sure there were no Brutes or any other soldiers on their side lying in wait to ambush them. Thankfully for them, there were none.

"Stay close Evelyn," he said to her as he stepped into the temple; Eve followed.

As they walked through the foyer, Eve could not help but feel that they were not alone. Then again, with the Grunt they had killed outside and the possibility that she had seen something in the jungle just before they had entered the structure was obviously going to make her feel that way, and it was likely there were more Loyalists in or around this place. Question was though; how many of them were there? There could be tens, or maybe even a few hundred of them. If there were then there was little chance she and the Arbiter would get through this place without running into them.

"The Oracle is likely to be somewhere at the other end of the temple," the Arbiter said to Eve as he looked down the corridor of the left wing of the temple to see if anything was there; and there was not. "But we must be cautious, Evelyn," he added, looking back at her. "There is no telling what they will have stationed here guarding him,"

She nodded in reply and looked around the foyer again, her eyes, though, looked a bit surprised as if they had been deceived of something.

"Y'know, the really weird thing is that I can't get out of my mind is that this just doesn't really look like a place they would hold Wally in," she said to the Arbiter with concern filling her voice.

"Well, they are likely to have an underground section added on somewhere to the temple," he replied quickly and firmly, though this made Eve and Auto more suspicious.

The Arbiter stopped by the large doorway that led into the rectangular section of the temple and pulled Eve by the arm over to the wall next to the corner of the doorway just to make sure nothing would be able to fire on them easily if there was any trap lying in wait. A second passed. Two. Three. The Arbiter crept forward and poked his head around the corner into the dimly lit corridor; looking

left and right to see that the only sources of light were coming through small cracks in the wall opposite the doorway or the open doorways at both ends of the corridor; near a turning that led into other parts of the building's ground floor.

Behind him, Auto whispered cautiously up to Eve: "I think he's not telling us something, Eve,"

She nodded. "I don't think any of them are," she whispered back. "They're definitely hiding something from us,"

"What are you two whispering about?" the Arbiter suddenly asked them, asking them jump.

He was looking back at them with a stern expression on his face as if he had heard them saying something rude about him behind his back.

Eve, however, was not intimidated by his gaze and replied to him with a firm look. "Well, Arbiter, me and Auto both get the feeling that you and the Elites are not telling us something,"

Upon hearing these words, the Arbiter's expression changed from a stern gaze to one that looked shocked, and did hold a sincerity of worry behind it, which Eve and Auto quickly saw by the slight widening of his eyes. Still, though, he did not back down to her.

"Evelyn, I assure you that neither I nor my comrades are hiding anything from y-"

THUD! The noise made him stop mid-sentence and both froze to the spot with fear as if they knew something big and dangerous was nearby. For a moment, no one moved; afraid to do so. Then the Arbiter turned and crept over towards the doorway that led out into the corridor; Eve close behind; both of them raising their weapons in case they came under attack. Stopping by the corner of the doorway, he poked his head out into the corridor and glanced left and right. Both ends ended at a wall, which he could see through the faint cracks in the wall opposite him; allowing daylight to flood in from outside, but at the left end was a small doorway where the light flooded in greatly. If the memory of this temple was right in his mind, that led out into a courtyard.

Eve walked past him into the corridor; her plasma rifle raised and her eyes searching every nook and cranny of the corridor as if searching for an invisible enemy.

The Arbiter, who removed himself from behind the wall, pointed down towards the doorway. "Down there, Evelyn," he told her.

She saw where he was pointing and nodded. "C'mon, follow me," she replied hastily and ran towards the doorway; the Arbiter followed.

When they reached it, she stopped and pressed herself against the wall to the right of the doorway; the Arbiter quickly rushing over to the other side of the doorway and doing the same there. Slowly, Eve poked her head out from behind the wall and looked into the courtyard. Before her was a small plain of grass between a

rectangular shaped building; or what was left of it. Over the past five years, the nature of the country had had a big impact on the temple. Large pieces of the building's corners and parts of its walls were missing, most of the remains of what had been the walls and ceilings where these holes had been were scattered about in the courtyard. The columns that ran around parts of the courtyard's ground level were broken and scattered amongst the grass and over much of the walls, from where Eve could see, large vines hung over them like great tentacles as if they were trying to take the building away and make it a part of the jungle. Eventually, providing the temple was not somehow blown to smithereens by some attack or disaster, that would happen but until then it was to slowly crumble away into nothing. Most of the vines, however, went around the many windows lined all around the edge of the courtyard, save for the few that were covered by them, and around the part of the wall opposite where Eve and the Arbiter were the courtyard's platform was completely clear as if it had been tended to by someone.

Eve turned to Auto. "You better hide, just in case we get attacked," she said to him.

He nodded. "I'll try and see if there's a path that leads to anywhere we can't see," he replied and disappeared into her shoulder.

Weapons raised and vigilance level at its height, Eve, quickly poking her head out once more just to make extra sure that there was nothing she had missed, stepped out into the courtyard, stopping just in front of the doorway as if waiting for a reaction, her blue eyes scouring every inch of the scene in front of her. Although it may look at first glance that she was being too slow in the sweep of the temple and then finding Wally, anyone else would be doing exactly the same if they were in her position.

The Arbiter, however, was not really seeing this point of her over-cautiousness and gave her a nudge from behind.

"Go on, Evelyn," he reassured her, though there was a tone in his voice that sounded as if he wanted her to hurry up and get a move on. "I shall cover you,"

Rolling her eyes, she walked on further into the courtyard, moving her hand left and right, her finger on the trigger of the weapon so as to fire on the moment that anything moved. Apprehension filled the air as she scanned every window as she moved further into the courtyard, coming close to one of the piles of remains of the columns, which had been smashed in many different pieces, both large and small as if it had been thrown there by a giant. The Arbiter followed about ten feet behind her, he too keeping an eye on the surrounding scene of this courtyard. Both knew that if any threat was going to attack them, it, or they, had a hundred different places to fire on them from. Any one of these windows or small holes in the sides of the building could be housing—God knows what. A sniper? A turret? A hidden motion device that would alert any nearby soldiers of the intruders' presence?

"Say, Arbiter?" Eve inquired, stopping next to the remains of the column as she looked back at him. "Whereabouts do you think the way is to where they're keeping Wally, if he's here that is?" she asked him.



"My guess, somewhere inside the back of the temple, as we did use to store sacred objects inside the catacombs that are below this structure," he replied to her, gazing around at the building again, though with a slight nervousness in his eyes; which Eve quickly noticed and began to grow suspicious.

"What's wrong?"

The Elite glanced back at her. "What? Nothing is wrong?"

His answer was quick and had a sort of nervous tone to it, which made her all the more wary of him.

"Arbiter, what is it you're not telling me?" she turned her body to face him completely as her voice began to grow more demanding. "And don't try and lie to me, I know there's something! What is it?"

"There is nothing wrong, Evelyn-"

"Guys!" The two were cut off from their conversation as Auto's avatar quickly rose up on Eve's shoulder, though this time his face held an expression of fear as if he had seen, or learned something frightening. "We need to go, now!"

Eve looked at him with a worried gaze, as did the Arbiter. "Why, what's wrong?" she asked him anxiously.

"I've just scanned the entire place, Eve," he told her. "There's Brutes here, but they don't have anyone here as prisoner. Wally isn't here,"

The Arbiter stepped over quickly. "Your construct, Evelyn!" he barked angrily. "There is a chance he is he-"

He was cut off when she suddenly turned around to face him, only the expression he saw on her face was one of real anger and hatred. Her eye was twitching; her teeth gritted together so hard they looked about to break and her free hand was clenched into a fist and beginning to shake. What! Wally was not here! The Arbiter had said he was! Unlessâ€¦|

"You!" she breathed heavily, venom in her voice as she stepped towards him, pointing and accusing finger at him. "Youâ€¦|You \_liar\_!" she almost shouted at him, her voice ringing out around the courtyard. "When I get my hands on you-"

"There will be no need for that!"

The deep voice reverberated around the courtyard, stopping Eve mid-sentence, quickly changing the expression on her face to one of shock and surprise. She turned and, along with the Arbiter and Auto, looked up at the platform to see a huge bulking figure dressed in dark red armour with a huge helmet that looked like an Aztec chieftain's headwear with two huge curved spikes that looked like fangs pointing upwards rather than downwards. He looked like some sort of king or leader addressing his people for a speech or some sort of special ceremony. His head turned to look down at them and he laughed loudly, which bounded off the walls and filled the air like thunder. Instinctively, Eve ducked down behind the remains of the

column next to her. The Arbiter went to do the same but the figure, who was now obviously a Brute, stopped him.

"Do not think of going anywhere so soon, Arbiter," he boomed. "There are more of us!" he added and barked out a command.

Almost simultaneously, from nearly every window, large figures appeared as if they had been conjured up by some kind of magic trick; all carrying various weapons that he had seen before and all were pointed directly at him. As if it were not worse, the sounds of close footfalls made him, and Eve, who was mostly obscured by the column, look over at the doorway they had entered to see another Brute standing there, armed with a Brute plasma rifle and aiming it directly at them, its red colour glazing brightly in the midday sun. A second Brute was standing next to him, mostly blocked from view by the wall and both were dressed in light blue armour. However, when they appeared in the doorway, the two's eyes went wide; not with shock, but anger, a seething, penetrating anger that made the expressions of a crazed predator etch across their face.

"Sir, \_she \_is with them!" one of them barked angrily.

The Brute on the platform looked questionably at them, though from a distance the Arbiter or the Brutes could not see it.

"Who?"

"The Demon! She is hiding there, behind the column!"

For a moment, no one moved as if the very words had frozen them in time; the sound of the wind the only thing that seemed to penetrate the silence. Then the Brute on the platform humphed loudly, questionable about whether there really was someone hiding behind the column. It was possible; after all, the Arbiter could not have come here alone without at least some form of help.

"Reveal yourself!" he barked at the column.

Now all eyes fell on the column and for a moment, Eve was uncertain what to do. Looking up, even the Arbiter was looking down at her as if expecting her to do something. She was afraid to get up, knowing that it was possible that as soon as she did so the Brutes would fire on her and kill her and the Arbiter in a matter of seconds. What was she to do? What was she to do?

Making up her mind, and breathing in deeply as if to inhale courage, she stood up from behind the column. Almost at once, the sound of deep voiced conversations filled her ears. She glanced up briefly at the Arbiter with a worried look on her face and then up at the Brute, who was silent, but if she was up close to him she would see that he, like the two Brutes who had told the others of her presence, was gripped by utmost fury to the point where his breathing had become silent with rage.

"You!" he barked out suddenly, pointing an accusing finger that shook slightly at her. He was so angry upon seeing her that for a moment he was struggling to speak. "You will pay, demon!" he finally said after a few moments.

Although fear was beginning to rise within Eve, which was surprising

as she had been in these sorts of predicaments many times before, she could not help but mentally sigh and say in a sarcastic manner: \_Why am I not surprised?\_

"It will be a great and historic day for the war!" the Brute said, lowering his hand. "Not only will the death of the Arbiter deliver a moral blow to our enemies, but the head of the demon shall avenge our loss of the Great Journey at her hands!"

The sound of laughter followed from some of the windows, no doubt that the gleefulness of killing her and the Arbiter was rife among the Brutes. They were virtually trapped by them and it would only take one order to end their mission.

Eve, however, took a defiant step forward towards the platform. Well, if there was one thing she would at least do if she was to die here, she would find out where the person was for who she had come for.

"Where's Wally?!" she demanded.

The noise around her ceased immediately, but the Brute chieftain just chuckled in reply.

"The Oracle?" he replied in humorous disbelief and chuckled again. "He is not here, demon! He is our prisoner and we are keeping him where we want, onlyâ€|" he shrugged. "He is not giving us what we wanted to hear about the Elites, so we shallâ€|\_dispose \_of him," he concluded, adding a kind of deadly tone on the word 'dispose', which made Eve panic slightly with fear but also increased her determination.

"Where is he?!" she demanded, her voice becoming ever more firm. "If you hurt him, you'll regret it!"

The chieftain and several others laughed loudly. Oh this was good joke! Their enemy was acting as if they could inflict great pain on them even when they were in a hopeless situation! Oh, this was of great amusement to them.

"I think not, demon!" the chieftain replied after several moments. "Rather, you are the one who is to be regretful for coming here. It was dangerous and yet you ventured on into a dangerous place. Now you shall regret it! Arms!"

Upon the command of the last word, all the Brutes aimed their weapons at the two, fingers placed on the triggers, ready to fire when the order was given. Eve and the Arbiter stood back-to-back and whipped up their plasma rifles in some kind of minor determination to try and defend themselves if the firing started, but they knew it was hopeless. With only two of them againstâ€|God knows how many Brutes here, as there probably were more hidden about that they just could not see, this really did look like the end for them. Their minds raced with apprehension. There had to be a way out of this mess and quick, or they were as good as dead!

Wait! Eve looked down at her belt and saw the sun flare. Yes! She had completely forgotten about it, but it was still there and she could use it now. The only problem was that she had to be quick and discrete in doing so in case the Brutes saw what she was doing.

She nudged the Arbiter, trailing her free hand over the sun flare, with her elbow and whispered to him. "Get ready. I'm gonna get us out of this,"

Before he could ask her how she intended to do so, she pressed a button on the top of the device and then pushed it off her belt, letting it drop to the ground. Almost as soon as it hit the grass, as if the movement had set it off, the device exploded into light almost as if the sun itself had suddenly appeared right next to them. The sudden explosion of light was met with roars from all directions as the Brutes hurried to get away from it, some falling over to the floors of the rooms with the windows where they had been standing. Reacting quickly, Eve, who shut her eyes, grabbed the Arbiter's arm and ran in the direction of the courtyard entrance as fast as her legs would carry her, hoping the Arbiter was able to keep up behind her.

All around them the air was filled with the shouting voices of the Brutes, who had now recovered from the shock of the sudden use of the device.

"Where are they?!"

"Find them! They must not escape the courtyard!"

"Block off all exits!"

"Shoot at the courtyard! Fire everything you have! Jump down there if you have to!" the chieftain's voice roared through the light.

Those words brought fear to Eve, who was running in the direction of, or at least she hoped it was, of the courtyard entrance, her arm out in front of her so as to hit the wall when she was near. They had to be near it anyway! They just had to be because if they were not, then they were dead.

Luckily, as the light from the flare began to dim, the outline of the wall began to form in front of her and, to her great relief, the doorway. Yes! They were almost there. That was their ticket out of here.

"There they are! Kill them!"

Suddenly, just as when it all seemed to go well, the Brute that had alerted the others to her presence appeared in the doorway, just feet in front of them; a look of nasty pleasure on his face as he held up his Brute plasma rifle up at them, his finger itching to press down and fire the barrage of ionized blasts that would kill them both and end their lives.

"Goodbye, demon!" he uttered gleefully.

Just then, Eve was pulled back, almost falling over, and felt her grip on the Arbiter's hand loosen completely. For a moment, she stood bewildered over what had happened but when a loud roar filled her ears she looked up and watched as the Brute that had just appeared in the doorway fell to the floor of the corridor, purple blood dripping from the end of the energy sword the Arbiter wielded in his hand. He looked back at Eve and nodded.

Suddenly, the Arbiter pushed to the ground by a flick of the arm of the other Brute, who had dived aside when the Arbiter had attacked his comrade. Now, filled with rage, he was determined to avenge his death and kill both the Arbiter and Eve, painfully if necessary, and hopefully.

As the Arbiter groaned and rubbed the back of his head, he saw the Brute stand over him, an amused look on his face and his plasma rifle aimed down at him. He tried to grab for his energy sword, but the Brute saw what he was trying to do and slammed his foot down on the Arbiter's hand, making him roar out in pain. He looked back up and met the Brute's gaze, seeing the urge to kill in them.

"Goodbye, Arbiter," he said sadistically in an amused manner.

"Get off him!"

Before the brute could even turn around in reaction to the shout, a plasma rifle flew front first into his face, breaking through the helmet's front protection and breaking his nose and knocking out a tooth. Purple blood flowed and the Brute cried out in pain, falling to the ground next to the Arbiter, who saw Eve then whip out her energy sword and plunge it into the Brute, silencing his cries.

"Thank you, Evelyn," the Arbiter thanked as he got up.

She nodded. "Let's just go, quickly before they find us here," she advised him and ran out through the doorway into the foyer; the Arbiter followed, grabbing his energy sword and leaving Eve's embedded in the Brute.

They ran through the entrance to the temple, down the stone steps and across the one hundred feet of open ground to the jungle trees, quickly burying themselves within the undergrowth. For a moment, neither of them moved as if fearing that if they did then the jungle would suddenly swallow them up. Tension filled the air, their hearts beating madly as if they were running a marathon. The Arbiter poked his head out under a low branch of the tree he was next to and looked back at the temple, expecting to see the Brutes rushing out after them after they were to have likely found the mess left behind by the two as they left the temple.

"See anything?" Eve whispered to him.

Just as the Arbiter opened his mouth to reply, a loud whirring sound promptly silenced him, which it likely would have done anyway as it seemed to reverberate everywhere, blocking out all the other noises of the jungle. Eve and the Arbiter looked back at the temple and a second later the shape of a large purple coloured ship rose up from behind it. It was a phantom, the craft that the Covenant had used to transport troops to and from areas of a battlefield during the war so it was not really any real surprise that the Brutes were still using them.

The craft rose until it was about forty feet above the ground and halted for a moment, hovering in mid-air as if waiting for something. Eve and the Arbiter watched it with tense eyes, expecting it to suddenly turn towards them and the three huge photon canons that were

swivelling and turning about on the bottom of the ship like sentries to start firing down at them. Thankfully, though, it did not do that but instead turned around so the back of the phantom was facing where Eve and the Arbiter were hiding and flew off, disappearing behind the treetops.

Rather than wait around to see what had happened to the other Brutes, as it was unlikely all of them could have fitted on that single phantom, unless there was another one or two parked somewhere else, Eve and the Arbiter retreated deeper into the jungle, continuously moving for about five minutes or so. Eventually they stopped in a small clearing to catch their breath.

"That wasâ€¦a closeâ€¦lucky escape!" the Arbiter breathed, leaning against a tree. "Are you okay, Ev-OW!"

He was sent sideways, almost falling to the ground, when her fist collided with the side of his head. It took him a moment to regain himself and when he did, he looked up at Eve furiously to see her standing there with a firm and angry look on her face and a look in her eyes that demanded an explanation. Auto, on the other hand, was standing on her shoulder, looking a little warily at her as if worried she was going to suddenly hit him.

"Why did you hit me?!" he demanded angrily.

"You know why!" she snapped in an equally angry tone. "Why the hell did you lie to me, Arbiter!"

He did not answer her but instead grunted as he rubbed the side of his head. The pain still lingered but was gradually going away.

"You're such a bastard, you know that!" she shouted at him. "Thanks to you, now the Brutes now that I'm here and they've probably gone off and are gonna tell everyone about me being here!"

Again he did not answer her, which made Eve all the more furious. She was just so angry that she could not think anything else other than pounding Arbiter. He had lied to her. In fact, all the other Elites had like Vadumee when they met him earlier on. They had purposely drawn her into their war and now she was under threat! She had played right into their hands!

"I am sorry, Evelyn," the Arbiter muttered, though it was loud enough for her to hear.

She blinked; the expression of anger still on her face. "Sorry?" she repeated in an unbelievable tone. "You're sorry?!" she said again and tutted loudly, turning away and walking over to a tree; hitting it hard with her fist when she reached it.

"This is just great!" she hissed to herself under her breath. "Now I'm thrown right into the middle of a warzone!"

Auto placed a hand on her cheek to comfort her. "Don't worry, Eve. We'll find Wally,"

Eve sighed and looked up at the tree, sniffing a little. From where she was standing, Auto could see the edge of a tear forming in her

eye and he patted her cheek lightly. He knew that she had not wanted this at all, neither had he, but the Arbiter had thrown them into the lion's den and now it was likely she was going to have to fight her old enemy once again.

Footfalls from behind indicated the Arbiter was approaching. He stopped next to her and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Evelyn, I am sorry for not telling you," he told her again, trying to sound comforting but seeing her reaction made him feel a little guilty about what he had done, but then again he had to remind himself that she was needed. Still, though, he still told himself that this mission had made him do something hard. "But there has been some good out of this encounter. We know for certain that they have the Oracle now. We can still find him,"

That seemed to lighten her mood a little and she looked back up at him somberly for a moment and nodded slightly. It did not last, however, as she sighed and looked back down at the ground. Even though they knew now that the Brutes still had Wally, the chieftain had also said that they were going to \_'dispose of him'\_. In other words, they were going to kill him. It just seemedâ€¦|hopelessâ€¦|completely and utterly hopeless. There was no way they could follow the phantom back to wherever it was going, likely to where they were holding Wally.

Eve placed her head against the tree trunk, but the Arbiter placed his arms around her and turned her around to face him, using the edge of his hand to lift up her chin so he looked into her eyes.

"Evelyn, I promise you that we will find him and rescue him in time," he said to her firmly. Her eyes did not show much reaction, probably because of the trick that had been played on her but he continued nevertheless. "We \_will\_ \_find\_ him and free him!" he repeated, patting her on the arm with his other hand, trying to get some reasonable reaction out of her to not make her give up hope.

She nodded a little and placed her head on his chest, sniffing a little. He patted her back several times, holding her close so as to calm her down a little. He could not help but feel sorry for her, but he had done years ago and they were still friends; her saving his life moments ago in the temple was clear enough of that, but even that was beginning to be swamped in question now over what had happened. Even though she was not indicating it or saying it directly, he did have a feeling that she would not really want to be as good friends with him, or even friends at all after what had happened.

After a moment, he pulled her up. "Come, we have to go. Before more Brutes find us," he warned.

Eve nodded and, wiping her eyes with her hand, followed him back into the undergrowth in the direction of the Elites' frontline.

Though it was not evident at the moment, it was obvious there was likely to be a rescue mission for Wally soon.

**\*\*The next day\*\***

If there was one thing that was definitely very similar between the jungles on Sanghelios and those on Earth, it was that the weather could change in a matter of hours and even though she had been on Sanghelios for about a day now, it reminded her quickly of her home world's large vegetation growth area. The only difference here was that back when she had been in the jungles, the weather had been more favourable. Now, however, it looked like it was going to take a turn for the worse. Dark clouds hung in the air and the occasional odd rumble of thunder rolled across the landscape. A storm was on its way and it would be a matter of time before it struck them.

What was more dangerous was that flying in the air above the jungles were three Sangheili phantoms, which still retained the recognizable light green colour they had used to distinguish their transport ships from the Covenant during the war but despite their armour, the storm could easily blow them out of the sky, not really what was wanted for those on board, especially the leading phantom that was flanked by the other two.

Looking out through a small window on the right side of the leading phantom, Eve looked down at the rushing landscape of green vegetation, though not in the slightest sense with amazement or whatever other emotion that would normally be associated with happiness but with anxiety, fear even lingering in her eyes like some kind of plague. This mission had worried her since last night and even Auto, who was standing on her shoulder and gently patting her cheek to try and comfort her and ease her anxiety, was not having any luck in cheering her up. Behind her, several other Elites were busy seeing to the ship's defences as they were very likely going to need them when they reached their destination.

Yesterday, after about an hour of travelling when they had fled the temple, Eve, Auto and the Arbiter had returned to the Elites' base, where she had snapped at Vadumee for tricking her into being dragged into their war. Later on, when they had retired to a small village about a mile behind the base and the line of trenches, an Elite transmission system had managed to stumble across a message from a Brute commander, who Eve and the Arbiter instantly recognized by his voice, and he was revealed to be Berkles, one of the main Brute chieftains on Sanghelios, to a small base somewhere in a part of the jungle where a mountain was. The message had given the order to prepare for Berkles' arrival the following day so as he could dispose of their prisoner; and upon hearing those words in the transmission Eve had sprung into a worrying wreck. She knew now where Wally was and had been desperate to go to the mountain, but the arbiter, along with Vadumee and several other Elites, had forbade her, saying that night time on Sanghelios was very dangerous, especially now that there was an enemy lurking about in the jungle and that to get to the mountain she would have to cross two different frontlines; thereby risking getting herself killed by either side. It had only been the organizing of a rescue mission that had calmed her nerves, though only with minor effect.

The following morning when everyone had awoken, which had been early as the word of the storm they were going through now was beginning to form, the last preparations for the mission had been organized quickly and then they set off. For the past two hours, they had been flying towards this mountain deep within Brute territory and now they



were almost there; just another few minutes or so.

As the phantoms passed a small river that cut through the jungle; the water now looking very dark as it reflected the clouds moving overhead, Eve could not help but begin to feel more worried, but it was not only on the rescue mission itself it was about the proximity of its outcome; whether it would succeed or fail. Of course, it would be up to fate to decide which of these would happen but she just could not help thinking that this mission might fail, that they might not get to Wally in time, or worse, that he might already be dead, right now! The transmission had not given them the exact time of when Berkles, the Brute commander, would 'dispose' of Wally; he could be doing it right now!

\_Calm down! \_Her mind seemed to snap at her angrily. \_Don't think of things like that! Just try and hope for the best.\_

Eve mentally smirked at that word. Hope. Huh, that had been something she had done years ago during and ever since the end of the war and a majority of the time it had not really worked, or if it had it had come at a price, almost as if she was some chosen one who was destined to succeed in everything but those with her would have to die. It was not fair, but it was around that she realised that fate never really was fair in its working; she would just have to rely on luck and, again, \_hope\_ they would make it in time to save him.

"Are you alright, Eve?" Auto asked her with a concerned tone, making her jump as he snapped her out of her thoughts; remembering that he was still there.

She looked at him with uncertainty crossing her features. "I wish," she sighed lowly and resumed looking back outside at the rushing landscape below.

"You're worried, aren't you?" he said expectantly and she nodded.

"Yeah," her tone was almost a whisper. "What if we don't get there in time? What if we get there and it's too late?"

"Hey, hey, don't worry," he reassured her comfortingly, reassuming his gentle patting of her cheek. "We'll get to him. We just have to hang onto our luck, Eve,"

"What if it runs out this time, though?"

"Wellâ€¦for us, it never really does. After all, we were lucky many times during the war, weren't we? We just have to hang onto it,"

She did not reply straight away but he could tell that he had cheered her up a little bit by the corner of a small smile on her lips. After a moment or two, she turned her head to face him.

"Thanks, Auto," she said.

He nodded. "It's fine. You know we're both here to take care of each other,"

She gave a small smirk and nodded lightly. "Of course," she replied.

Just then, the door to the cog pit opened and the Arbiter emerged, talking to someone over his shoulder.

"Prepare for the ascent in the next minute or so," he was saying.

Another voice uttered a reply that wounded like an obeying response to Eve from what she heard of it. The door closed and the Elite commander walked over to Eve.

"How far are we from the mountain?" Eve asked him, turning to her body to face him completely.

"Several miles, but that is not our concern," he replied and walked over to the centre of the room where a single column stood with a small control panel on the side of it.

He pressed one of the buttons and the column broke in two; the two opposing sides moving away until they were only just visible from the surface of the room they were attached to. A holographic image of the landscape appeared in mid-air between the two sections of the column, revealing a large bushy area that was obviously the jungle; all of it around a large mountain that rose much higher than the jungle itself. Around the sides of the mountain were several flat points and small holes, likely to be caves on the real thing itself, were just noticeable on the mountain sides where these flat points were located.

What really drew Eve's attention, however, was that on some of these flat points were several large anti-air wraiths and seeing them made her skin crawl; particularly in the fact that their phantoms were flying right towards the mountain. There were about these wraiths altogether and she could see also that around the bottom of the mountain were several tall metallic towers sticking up out of the jungle tops, no doubt these being some sort of turrets, and this, she reminded herself, was only what the hologram was showing her. There was likely to be many other defences hidden down there, probably along with an unimaginable number of Brutes and their allies.

"As you can see, attacking will be difficult," the Arbiter said. "So we have devised a plan to take the Brutes by surprise and enable us to break through to where they are keeping the Oracle,"

"And that plan would be?" Auto inquired as Eve was too busy scrutinizing the hologram as if trying to find something appealing.

"Luckily for our ships, the Brutes do not have any excellent detection systems within or around the mountain," the Elite explained, nodding towards the hologram. He reached up and pressed a second button on the control panel. The three phantoms appeared in mid-air and moved on voice command with the Arbiter as he spoke. "We shall hide in the clouds until we are nearer the mountain then quickly descend and split up into three teams. You and I and several others shall be dropped onto here-" he pointed to a small, clear flat point on the side of the mountain about half-way up. "Whilst the other two teams land on the ground around the base of the mountain. We shall then fight our way through the Brute defences and reach the

prison cell," he looked back at Auto. "You will be needed to try and guide us through and locate where the Oracle is,"

He nodded. "Shouldn't be too hard, providing nothing happens that disables me picking up his signal," he answered with a hint of concern in his voice.

"Question," Eve piped up all of a sudden, as if she were a statue come to life and turned her head to look at the Arbiter. "Once we get to Wally; how do we escape? The Brutes are likely to have called for help and blocked our escape,"

"The phantoms will return to pick us up, as the air defences shall be destroyed," the Arbiter answered confidently as if expecting everything to go according to the plan he was revealing to them. "If we cannot leave by the phantoms then we shall try and escape with the Brute ground vehicles, they are bound to have plenty of them stationed nearby,"

"That's providing we don't get torn to pieces in trying to get to them," Eve commented under her breath, but the Arbiter and Auto both heard her.

"Do not fear, Evelyn," the Elite reassured her. "We will win this. I promise you; we will get to Wally,"

Normally, these words would have cheered her up but now she suddenly seemed angry and glared at him.

"Like you promised yesterday?" she asked him sarcastically, which did surprise him a little. She shook her head; the glare still lingering on her face. "Sorry, Arbiter, but I think after what happened yesterday I can't really trust you completely right now,"

An look of annoyance etched across his face and he went to reply when the cog pit door opened and a voice called out from there.

"Arbiter, come quickly! The mountain is in sight!"

He looked back at the open doorway, sighed heavily and then looked back at Eve. "We can continue this later. Come,"

Turning, he hurried off into the cog pit, but Eve stayed where she was, turning her full attention back to the hologram; the phantom parts of it now having disappeared. She was worried, not terrified. They were going to save Wally but still the thought of them being too late just clung onto her mind like some sort of incurable disease. She just could not get it out of her mind what would happen if they did fail, mostly to her. If they failed she would not be able to live with herself. This failure would gnaw away at her; after all, she had come here to save him and if they found him dead or worse taken away then she would find it very difficult to continue on with her rescue mission.

Auto had recognized her anxiety as well and he too began to grow worried for her. Although they had spent much of their time together before in the war worrying, they, and especially Eve, had always overcome it and triumphed in the end. Now, however, she was looking as if everything was lost and willing to give up, only this time much more serious as ever before. He was really beginning to worry about

her.

"Evelyn, come quickly!" the Arbiter's voice called out from the cog pit, snapping her back into reality.

She rushed into the cog pit where two Elites dressed in light blue armour, the old minor Elites as she would call them, sitting in the pilot's seats; the Arbiter standing between them. Stretched out in front of them was the jungle some few hundred feet below. Directly ahead of them, about three miles away or so, was the mountain, its great size gradually growing bigger as they approached it.

"Go into the clouds," the Arbiter ordered.

The view through the phantom's windscreen window quickly changed from a green landscape with a mountain to a thick and grey world as it rose into the clouds. Behind the leading the phantom, the other two followed, all three quickly disappearing within the grey swirling mass that was to soon open and release the storm onto the surface below like some great beast being unleashed to wreak havoc on the world. Eve began to feel a little worried when they suddenly flew into the clouds; Auto feeling exactly the same.

"I hope they know which way they're going," he muttered to Eve anxiously and she nodded in reply.

For about a minute or so, though it seemed like forever, the phantoms flew on through the clouds, the pilots nor the Arbiter saying anything to them, almost as if they had completely forgotten about them being there. Eve walked up behind the left pilot's seat and looked out past the side of the pilot's head to see the greyness rushing past them. Then, the everlasting grey world that had engulfed them began to rise and she felt the ship descend. The pilot in front of Eve cleared his throat.

"All soldiers; prepare for the landing," he said into a hidden radio on the control panel in front of him.

"Activate the turrets," the Arbiter said to the pilot in the right seat, who nodded and pressed a button on the armrest of his seat.

As the phantoms broke out the cloud, the mountain appeared just below them. Its grey surface looked dead compared to the jungle around it but almost as soon as they appeared, it seemed to spring to life as tens of large green plasma blasts began flying up towards them from all over the mountain.

"Take evasive action!" the Arbiter ordered.

The phantoms swerved and rose and fell to avoid the deadly blasts as they neared them, some only just missing the craft by a few metres. One exploded in front of the leading phantom and the ship rocked wildly, making Eve and Auto think briefly of them being blown out of the sky. The only thing that was reassuring them was the quick thinking of the pilots, though personal experience knew that it would usually take a lot more than flight experience to avoid being blown up in mid-air.

"\_All turrets commence firing on the Brute anti-air!" \_a voice barked out from the phantom to the left, behind the leading phantom.

A barrage of blasts flew out from the Elites' ships down at the mountainside, some of them hitting their targets but most failed as the Brutes piloting the wraiths quickly moved their vehicles out of the way. Only one wraith near the drop off point for Eve and the Arbiter was hit and blew up in a fiery explosion, killing the Brute driving the vehicle.

Inside the cog pit of the leading phantom, the ship rocked wildly and Eve grabbed onto the Arbiter's hand as he grasped the side of the pilot's seat to stop himself from being sent to the floor.

"Quickly, descend the ship! The other two will follow!" he barked out at the pilots, who obeyed and pulled down on the controls of the ship, causing it to descend; the other two phantoms behind it following close behind; all three almost zigzagging to avoid being hit by the still oncoming barrage of blasts from the mountainside.

When the three craft were a few hundred feet from their target, the two rear phantoms quickly broke away from the first and descended towards the ground at the base of the mountain, all of their turrets firing away like mad at the Brutes and their allies who were rushing about on the ground who were rushing about and trying to get to a defensive position. The lead phantom began to slow to a halt as it reached the mountain top. Upon first glance, this would have looked like a death sentence for the crew but it was lucky for them that a large bulge on the side of the mountain gave the phantom some protection from the wraiths on the plateaus below. For the moment they were safe, but there was no telling if the Brutes had any banshees or phantoms of their own parked nearby so they had to be quick.

The ship hovered a few feet above the plateau that was big enough to fit a small house on and was covered with small rocks and holes. The sides opened up and the Arbiter and Eve jumped down from the craft's interior onto the rocky surface of the mountain. One of the Elites shouted a good luck to them as the craft's sides closed and began to ascend once more, kicking up a small cloud of dust as it went before flying back off into the clouds. Eve watched it go with a look of apprehension. So this was it. They were on their own now to find and get to Wally.

"Over there! Kill them!"

Looking over in the direction of the shouting, the two saw an unarmoured Brute emerge from a small cave carrying a Brute shot in his hands; flanked by three minor Grunts, all of who were wielding plasma pistols. The Brute fired a shot at Eve and the Arbiter but missed as they dived out of the way and took out their own weapons, both of them wielding a plasma rifle with an energy sword activator and two plasma grenades. They had really come prepared for this attack and it was good they did for the amount of resistance they were faced with.

The Arbiter raised his plasma rifle and fired at the Brute, hitting him several times across the chest. The Brute roared in pain and was thrown backwards a few feet by the force of the blasts, though he quickly recovered and responded with another two shots from his weapon. The Arbiter ducked and missed the first one but the second,

though it too missed him, exploded by his foot and the force of the explosion knocked him to the ground. His shield lit up as the impact occurred, signalling for him to get to cover, which he did by running behind a nearby boulder, just missing a third shot that exploded on the front of it.

Eve, meanwhile, had dived into a hole and quickly rose up and fired a barrage of light blue blasts at the Grunts, hitting and killing two of them. The third one yelped and hid behind the Brute.

"Get away from me and start shooting, you fool!" he shouted at the grunt, kicking him away forcefully with his foot.

This distraction, however, was fatal. Seeing that the Brute was preoccupied, both Eve and the Arbiter fired at him with their weapons to the point where the heat caused by the ionized blasts felt like it would burn their hands. The Brute was hit repeatedly and the roars that he bellowed were akin to that of a dinosaur's. Purple blood flowed and burn marks reached all across his skin, which only made him bellow louder.

Finally, he collapsed to the ground and moved no more. Eve then fired a few final shots at the last Grunt just to finish him off.

"Nicely done, Evelyn," the Arbiter called over to her as he walked out from behind the boulder. "Now let's get inside before more of them arrive,"

Nodding in agreement, she followed him across the plateau, both of them avoiding stepping on the bodies of the fallen Covenant, to the cave entrance and as soon as they entered it they were greeted briefly with a wave of darkness as if all the light in the world had been shut off. Then, all of a sudden, a set of lights built into the rock ceiling turned on, revealing the cave to be a long tunnel that turned at hard angles both left and right multiple times as it gradually descended into the interior of the mountain.

"Well, that'll save us from wondering into something," Eve commented approvingly at this.

"Let us just hope it will lead to where they are holding the Oracle," the Arbiter replied and began to run down the tunnel; Eve followed.

The further they went down the tunnel system, the more they felt it was going to lead directly into the heart of the mountain itself because whenever it turned left or right they found themselves going down further towards where they knew, or at least hoped, the ground would be. It was when they had been moving through the tunnels for about four or five minutes or so, they began to hear the faint sounds of loud bangs of what sounded like anti air wraiths firing, meaning they were close to them, and not even a minute passed until they suddenly found themselves in a large circular save with two tunnels exiting it, one of the left wall, the other on the right. The entire cave was lit up by a single, dim light that had been built into the ceiling, it flickering lightly several times as a bang emanated from outside. As soon as they saw them, it was obvious to the two that they were going to be faced with two problems.

"Which way do we go?" Eve asked herself, looking at one tunnel and

then at the other.

"My scan of the mountain's interior has revealed both of these tunnels lead to different places rather than meeting up as one," he replied as he appeared on her shoulder. "The one on the right-" he nodded at it. "That one leads to another tunnel system that's connected to the entrances to the plateaus where the wraiths are. The other one-" he nodded at the left tunnel. "That one leads somewhere else, I don't know exactly where but it does go further into the mountain,"

As soon as he stopped speaking, Eve and the Arbiter's eyes met as if they were expecting the other to come up with a decision. Either that or they were expecting the other to go the way they wanted to go. It was clear to Eve that the Arbiter had different intentions to her despite both of them coming here to find and free Wally, whom she knew he would abide by but his securing of this mountain in defeating the Brutes was going to come first to him.

Finally, after a moment, the Arbiter spoke up.

"I must go and aid my brothers, Evelyn," he told her and she sighed heavily in frustration at his decision. "I am sorry," he added in an apologizing manner.

"It's fine," she replied lowly, clearly annoyed. "I'll meet or contact you and the others when we've freed Wally,"

Her Elite friend nodded. "Very well. Good luck in finding him," and ran off towards the right tunnel, disappearing down it.

When he was out of sight, Eve shook her head lightly in a displeased manner, an equal look of emotion etching across her face.

"So much for damn teamwork!" she muttered angrily and ran over to the left tunnel.

The lights in this tunnel were much dimmer than in the cave but it was enough to reveal to her something that was metallic and large at the other end about thirty feet ahead of her. Her descending through the mountain told her that this was likely, and hopefully, to lead to some part of the base within the rock where they were holding Wally. She ran down the tunnel to it, coming to a halt next to where the metal surface met the rock and looked up with Auto to only see rock, meaning this was the top of something. An elevator maybe? Or was it some kind of trapdoor?

"Is this an elevator?" Eve asked him, looking down at the flat metal square with a small control panel that held a hand scanning device at the opposite end.

"Yep, it leads all the way down to about one hundred or so feet from the bottom of the mountain," he replied. "My guess, this should lead to somewhere important,"

Eve nodded in agreement. "Hopefully to Wally," she commented hopefully and walked onto the elevator over to the control panel and placed her hand on the scanning device but nothing happened once she took her hand off it.

"It seems that the device is genetically set for the Brutes or those on their sides," Auto said. "Give me a sec."

He disappeared back into her suit, leaving Eve to wait for what Auto was going to do, though she was a little worried in case what he did to start it moving suddenly broke it out of place and fell down the tunnel. Thankfully, when the elevator moved again it only jolted slightly and began to descend into the tunnel.

"That should do it," he said, his avatar appearing back on her shoulder. "Just made your genetic code and covered it over with that of a Covenant that has used it earlier. We should be down there in a few minutes,"

"I never knew you could do that," she commented, slightly surprised as she looked at him.

He just shrugged. "Well, just one of my many talents,"

She smirked and rolled her eyes, turning her head back at the walls, watching the rock gradually rise past them as the elevator descended further into the tunnel. She began to wonder how far they were from Wally and if they would get to him in time, as she was certain that by now the Brutes would have gotten whiff of why they had come here and would have sent someone to kill him. It was just going to have to be up to fate and hope again to enable her and Auto to get to him before their enemies did.

That was providing if, and emphasising the word if, he was still alive for them to rescue.

As the elevator reached near the end of the tunnel, which Eve noticed by a faint glow of light coming up from underneath it, a faint noise suddenly reached her ears and made her as silent as a ghost, her ears listening carefully like a gazelle out on the savannah plains listening out for a predator. Her hands gripped tightly on her weapons, ready to use them as soon as she came across anything that was hostile. Then, suddenly, the noise came again, only this time it was louder and she could make it out to be a high-pitched, squeaky voice, meaning only one thing.

Almost as soon as the noise stopped, the light burst through in front of Eve and she saw it was a large tunnel entrance with, from where she was standing on the elevator, three minor Grunts and, as the elevator descended further, a Jackal with its activated shield. All four of them were looking at the elevator with confused expressions, knowing that they had not called for it with the control panel on the wall next to them and that all the Brutes above had been sent off to repel the attack. Plus, the Elites could not have activated it so quickly or even that easily for that matter. Something was definitely wrong.

Eve backed away from the side of the elevator, taking out her plasma rifle and placing her finger on the trigger. Auto's avatar quickly disappeared back inside her bodysuit, knowing what was coming. The level of tension shot up like the temperature in a thermometer rising when dipped into a cup of boiling hot water.

The elevator came to a halt at the end of the tunnel, in full view of the Covenant soldiers awaiting its arrival.



"AAAAHHHH! It's the demon!" one of the Grunts screamed alongside a screech from the Jackal; all four of them making a grab for their weapons.

Eve, however, was too quick for them, bringing up her weapon and firing a barrage of sky blue blasts at the four Covenant soldiers. The Jackal screeched loudly as it was hit and was thrown backwards to the floor, dead. The Grunt standing directly behind him was also quickly dealt with by a blast that struck it in the face. The two remaining Grunts immediately panicked and fled up the tunnel, waving their arms about in terror and Eve put a few blasts into their backs to take care of them and prevent them from alerting anyone else.

"Not exactly a greeting you'd expect," Auto said, his avatar forming on her shoulder, looking down at the fallen bodies of the Covenant as Eve stepped off the elevator.

"Let's just hope there aren't many of them between us and Wally, \_if he's here\_," she replied, a worried tone of emphasis on the last three words.

She ran down the tunnel to the turning at the end and into the next tunnel, though this one joined up to another large cave exactly the same as the previous one she and the Arbiter had split up in, apart from one minor difference.

Eve swore under her breath, her level of frustration now rising higher than ever as she entered the cave. This minor difference was actually four different tunnels leading out of the save in completely different directions. Well, this was just fantastic! Here they were stuck in the middle of a Covenant infested mountain and now they were lost and probably on the last few minutes of trying to get to Wally before the Brutes did.

"Which way do we go?!" Eve asked herself, her voice quivering with desperation, her head frantically turning from one tunnel to the next.

"Hang on, Eve," Auto reassured her in a calming voice, his avatar disappearing back into her bodysuit. "I'll try and scan this part of the mountain and see if we can find the right tu-" KZK!

Suddenly, like a switch being flipped, Auto's voice was cut off from Eve and, simultaneously, the lights to the cave and the tunnels all shut off at once. By the looks of it, the Elites must have scored a direct hit on the power source for the lighting in the mountain. It was not entirely good thing though as Eve began to panic as she was surrounded completely by pitch black darkness, not knowing if there was any Covenant on their way down here to deal with her. What was more that worried her, what had happened to Auto?

"Auto?" she called out, squeezing her shoulder and resting her hand on it to grab his data cord, but nothing came up. "Auto, talk to me!" she cried, her voice beginning to fill with panic, but she still got no response. "Come on, talk to me!"

\_HIIIISSSSSS!\_

Upon hearing the noise that radiated all over the cave, she froze in place, not moving a muscle and holding her breath as if trying to impersonate a statue. That sound was instantly recognizable to her and, as if grabbed by a giant hand, she was overwhelmed with fear. Could itâ€¦could it be thatâ€¦\_they \_were here?

\_HIIIIIISSSSSS!\_

"Oh God!" Eve whimpered under her breath in a terrified voice. "As if this couldn't get any wors-AH!"

The inflammation seared up across her shoulder and back as if someone had set fire to her. Her arm began to shake in reaction to the pain and she grasped her shoulder tightly as if to try and conceal it and stop the sudden pain from spreading any further. Her eyes slammed shut, her teeth gritted together to the point where they looked like they were going to break each other apart, but she kept her mouth shut tightly to try and not cry out in pain in case she brought those she did not want to believe were here to her.

Then just as quickly as it came, the pain vanished, leaving Eve bewildered. She lifted up the shoulder part of her uniform and saw that there was no mark whatsoever there, no burn or red mark, no scar, no cut, absolutely nothing at all. It was as if it had healed itself completely, or even as if nothing happened at all. Eve was just left completely confused and worried. What the hell was going on?!

\_HIIIIIISSSSSSSS!\_

There it was again, though this time it sounded like it was coming from one certain direction. Eve looked in the direction of the noise and, as if it were a motion detector, a light brown/green light came to life in a tunnel on the wall to her right, illuminating a small tunnel. Curious, she waked into the middle of the cave to see where it was coming from and saw the light coming around another left turning at the end of the tunnel about fifty feet from her. Now confusion began to fill her mind as she did not know what it was or how it came down here all of a sudden. Nor did she know why she was suddenly walking towards it as if by no will of her own. It was as if it was coaxing, no, seducing her into following it. She did not know why but she just felt like she had to follow this light and very quickly her walking turned into running as she entered the tunnel.

When she reached the corner and looked down the next tunnel, however, the light had disappeared completely and almost as soon as it had, the green lights in the tunnel came back on, illuminating it once again. At the other end of the tunnel, about sixty or so feet from her, was a large silver door that was the only way out of this tunnel, besides of course the way she had come. Now this was intriguing. Why had this light led her and Auto to this tunnel? There was nothing hereâ€¦unlessâ€¦

"Eve!" Auto's avatar suddenly shot up out of her bodysuit, a look of utter fear on his face. "Are you okay? I picked up the sudden pain in your body! What was it?"

"Iâ€¦I don't know," she replied hesitantly, as if not wanting to tell him something. "I just happened, butâ€¦but I think it led us

here, "

"What do you mean?"

"The door," she nodded to the door at the end of the corridor. "I think that might be where Wally is," her voice was suddenly becoming brighter now, as if feeling she was at the end of a long journey and the end line was directly in sight. "We have to get to him now!"

Before Auto could interject, Eve was running as fast as she could to the door at the end, her mind completely set on it and ignoring anything and everything else around her. However, when she was about ten feet from the door, she heard shouting coming from the other side reached her ears.

\_"Silence, you fool! Or I will cut you myself!" \_

A loud cry followed this voice, which only made Eve panic even more. Desperation filled her like water filling up a tank. She had to get in there, now!

She pounded her fist as hard as she could against the door once and then activated her energy sword, hoping that the Brute on the other side would come to investigate. Sure enough, the door opened and a huge, burly looking Brute emerged, a look of anger on his face, probably having been fed up with whoever he was dealing with and then suddenly this pounding on the door. Eve struck quickly, slamming her energy sword into his side. The Brute barely had time to cry out as the weapon cut into his flesh for less than a moment before Eve pulled it out and he dropped to the floor, dead. Looking through the doorway, she walked into the room on the other side.

Like the two caves she had been in earlier, the room was dimly lit and small with only an extra array of light coming through the doorway behind Eve; it closing almost as soon as she was inside as if it were a monster trying to swallow her. Her eyes scanned very portion of the room, trying to find the source of the voice she had heard crying out after the Brute had started shouting.

"Uuuuugh!"

The moaning drew her and Auto's eyes to a corner of the room where a shape was pressed against the wall, though this part of the room was too dark for them to see who, or what it was. Gingerly, she approached it, not knowing what it was, though she was mentally praying to herself it was who she was looking for. As she approached the shape, it suddenly looked up at her, stopping her just feet away. A pair of small hazel eyes stared back at Eve and Auto, telling them that this was a person, but was he/she the right one?

"E-E-Eve?" the figure croaked weakly, almost as if in surprise.

As soon as she heard the voice, Eve's heart stopped dead and Auto's eyes grew wide. They both recognized that voice. It was a man's and they had heard him enough many times before. Eve stepped forward towards the figure, stopping right in front of him, and Auto made his avatar brighter, lighting up the dark part of the room around them and revealing the figure.

As soon as the figure laid his weak and flickering eyes on them, a small smile crept across his face.

They had found him.

## 16. Escape from the mountain

Eve just stared at the man trapped against the wall with utter amazement in her eyes, the humming of the energy binders around his arms and legs that were keeping him attached to the wall the only sound that seemed to break the silence. Auto too was completely overwhelmed with shock as he took in the figure in front of him.

This man was someone who looked to be in forties with mostly brown hair but it was turning grey in some parts with hazel eyes that looked worn and tired and filled with fright as if he had seen something terrible. A scar was just visible on his chin and going down towards the top of his neck. His bodysuit was a dark blue colour, with boots that were part of the clothing, and was covered in the symbols of the Forerunners and on his right arm was a bulge that looked as if he had some kind of swelling on his arm underneath the thin sleeve.

The man coughed weakly and smiled again at Eve, his half-shut, tired eyes looking into her deep blue ones as she stepped forward and placed a hand on the side of his face; a small tear trickling down her cheek; the prospect of her succeeding in her mission here on Sanghelios was done. She had found him.

"You're alive, Wally," she said quietly, but her voice was clearly happy enough to tell him that she would have leapt and cried for joy if she could.

He gave a weak laugh in reply. "Iâ€¦I knew you would come back. Iâ€¦I promised I would see you again,"

She gave a small gasp as more tears fell down her face, overcome with joy, and she embraced him tightly, unable to restrain herself. Wally exhaled in a peaceful manner when she did this, though a feeling of sadness arose through him as he could not reply in turn. Luckily though, Auto seemed to sense this and walked off Eve's shoulder and onto his left hand that was pushed up against the wall as if it had been chained there and knelt down and rested his hand on the energy binder. At once, the binder disappeared into thin air, freeing Wally's arm. Auto quickly walked over to the other hand and did the same to that one, freeing that arm as well.

"Thank you," Wally thanked him gratefully and embraced Eve tightly with his arms, the two holding each other tenderly for a moment as Auto removed the binders on Wally's legs; freeing him completely like a slave who had finally been told he was free to go from his harsh place of work and free to start and live a new life.

Eve felt this sense of complete fullness engulf her as if she had been missing a part of herself for a long time and had finally found it and made it a part of her once again. For so long since the end of the war she had had this feeling that she still missed Wally and now

her chance to free him had brought her to this mountain prison and she had done just that. Oh, it was an amazing feeling, one that she had not felt for so long and so they remained embraced for what seemed like forever, forgetting for a brief moment the war raging outside and enjoying this peaceful and beautiful sense.

Auto, who was standing on the floor by their feet, cleared his throat which promptly snapped them out of their embrace.

"Okay guys, moment's over," he announced, though the tone in his voice easily told them that he too was happy they had finally reunited. "We better get going just in case more Brutes or their allies show up,"

Eve nodded in agreement and looked down into his eyes from her 6ft 4 height, Wally still being his normal 6ft height he had been years ago when they had last seen each other. Though they both wished to continue their moment, they knew that it was best not to outstay their welcome here as it had only been by sheer luck that Eve and Auto had gotten here just in time to rescue Wally from being killed.

"Let's go," she said to him taking him by the arm and, quickly grabbing Auto and setting him back on her shoulder, led Wally out of the room and into the corridor, trying to avoid running into the dead body of the fallen Brute as they went.

Running as fast as they could, the two ran down the first tunnel, turned into the next and ran down that one but came to a halt as they entered the large cave at the end. Now they were faced with a problem with the many tunnels that led off in different directions. Obviously Eve knew that the tunnel leading off to the left was the way back up into the tunnels above but there was no telling whether the Arbiter would still be up there or if any Brutes would be arriving that way rather than through the ground level because of the attack on the mountain. The other two tunnels, at the opposite end of the cave and on the right wall, were a real problem; any one of them could lead to the outside but which one?

"Damn!" Eve hissed in annoyance, tightening her grip on Wally's arm as if she were a parent afraid of losing her young child whilst she were not looking as her eyes scoured the tunnel entrances from one to the other. "There just has to be a way out of here!" she said to herself, turning to Wally. "Can you remember which way you were brought you in?" she asked him, hoping for a yes.

He shook his head. "No, I was knocked out when I was brought here. I have no recollection whatsoever," he told her and Eve sighed in frustration.

Great! Now this escape from the mountain was much harder! Well, they were just going to have to take one tunnel and hope for the best as she doubted that they would be able to come back and try another; the Brutes and/or any other guards were probably on their way down here right now.

"We'll just have to risk getting out of here ourselves," she said, looking once more at the tunnels and mentally picking one. "Let's try this o-"

"KILL THE ARBITER!"

The yelling made them jump and drew their attention to the tunnel on the left to see a large figure backing towards them, firing away madly with the Covenant carbine in his hands at a group of Brutes running towards him. It was the Arbiter. One of the Brutes he fired at was hit and fell down to the floor with a momentary roar of pain before going silent, his comrade behind him quickly following suite. A few blasts struck the Arbiter's shield and lit up it momentarily before fading away and the Elite, quickly responding before the Brutes scored more direct hits and broke through his shields, took out a plasma grenade, lit it and tossed it down the tunnel.

"Look out!", "Move, out of my way!" was all that they heard as soon as he had done so. Then, with an almighty BANG followed by the sounds of rock caving in, which covered the cries of the Brutes as they were slain, the plasma grenade exploded and caused parts of the tunnel to cave in, throwing up a mighty cloud of dust. Coughing, the arbiter stepped out of the tunnel into the cave.

"Not bad, Arbiter," Eve piped up, making him jump and wheel round quickly with his weapon raised, though he lowered it when he saw the two standing there and a look of relief came upon his face.

"Ah, I am glad that you are all safe," he said, walking up to them. "Especially for you, Oracle," he added to Wally.

"Thank you, Arbiter," he replied. "Unfortunately, we have to find a way out of this mountain and to safety,"

"Do you think you know the way?" Eve asked him hopefully and though the Arbiter did not shake his head it was obvious to her that he too was uncertain of where to go.

"I can only assume a path out of here and back to the others, Evelyn," he told her, looking at all of the tunnels around them. "I am just as lost as you are," he added with a low tone that showed his anxiousness.

Eve sighed again. "Well, we'll just have to make do with one and hope for the best," she repeated, looking towards the tunnel ahead of her, that one likely being the way she intended for them to leave the mountain through. "And let's hope we don't run into any more Brutes," she added with a fearful tone, looking past the Arbiter at the wall of rock that blocked the way to the cave from the tunnel to the left.

"There were more behind those Brutes, they chased me from the top after I destroyed their anti-air," the Elite told her. "That wall will not hold them forever,"

"Then we better get moving," Eve replied and ran towards the tunnel ahead of her, still clutching Wally by the arm; the Arbiter followed close behind them.

Just like the tunnels above, this one sloped down at several points when it turned in a kind of U shape. Smaller tunnels led off to the left and right as the three went past but they mostly led up into the mountain or came to dead ends. The noise of the battle from outside was gradually becoming noticeable as they went, which only heightened

the hopes of Eve, Wally and the Arbiter as they knew they had to be getting close to the outside and eventual freedom from the Brutes. Surely they could not be far from the bottom now.

Then, the tunnel came to a straight level and led towards a large cutting out in the rock with a metallic floor visible at the end. Eve's eyes lit up; it was an elevator! Yes, now they could get out of here and leave!

"C'mon, we can get outta here," she said, leading Wally down the corridor with the Arbiter following close behind.

When they reached the elevator, she rested her hand on the hand scanning device, allowing Auto to manipulate the device that you had to be a Brute to activate by imprinting Eve's hand in its place. The elevator shook slightly as it unlocked itself and then began to descend into a long tunnel towards, which Eve hoped desperately, the ground floor and a way out of the mountain.

"Finally," Eve said in a relieved tone and turning to Wally. "You're free and we can leave for good and go home," she told him and embraced him tightly.

Wally did embrace her back but was a little uneasy. "Home?" he repeated her, confused. "Do you mean, your home world, Earth, Eve?" he asked her.

"Yeah. Remember all those years ago I said you could come to Earth and make that your new home, well you can do that now," she told him, happiness clearly in her voice.

Behind them, the Arbiter gave a low chuckle. He was happy that Wally was free, but more or less he was annoyed because now he knew that with him no longer in Brute hands Eve was going to try and find a ship to get them back to Earth and leave him and his forces here at the mercy of the Brutes. In fact, even though this feeling of hope in him was relatively minor, he was hoping that something would come along and stop her from leaving.

Just then, when the elevator was about half-way down the tunnel, the sounds of explosions and gunfire began to grow louder, meaning they were getting closer to it. Eve let go of Wally and took out her plasma rifle and the Arbiter readied his carbine.

"You may want to take cover, Oracle," he said to Wally.

"Are you sure you will not need my assistance?" he asked them, clearly showing he wanted to be of any help to them; obviously though without him being involved in harming anyone.

"Here comes the elevator!" a deep voice from below exclaimed, stopping the three in mid-conversation.

"How did it get down here? We did not call for it!" another barked in an un-amused tone, clearly suspicious.

Eve looked over to the Arbiter and nodded, readying her weapon. He did the same by quickly putting another cartridge into it. Both were ready to fight against the Brutes when they came into view.

Then the wall of the tunnel passed and in front of them was a large dug out hole in the wall that extended for about twenty feet before going into a curve and ending at another tunnel. Eve, Wally and the Arbiter quickly backed away towards the other side of the elevator so as not to expose themselves too much because when the elevator was about twenty feet from the bottom of the tunnel a group of Brutes came into view.

"I shall pick off the first," the Arbiter said to Eve, aiming his carbine at the Brutes.

When the elevator was about ten feet from the bottom of the tunnel, and the Brutes' heads just a few more below the bottom of the metallic device, the heads of those at the back of the group of about four, the Arbiter opened fired with two shots from his weapon. The Brutes barely had time to react as one of their comrades, who was unarmoured, was hit in the face and forehead and crumpled to the floor with barely a sound.

"What the?!" one of the Brutes, who was dressed in red armour and wielding a spiker, roared. "What happened?! What is going on?!"

"It is them, the Arbiter and the demon!" another roared, pointing at the elevator and whipping out his Brute shot. "The Oracle is with them! Kill them all!"

The Brute fired a grenade shot at Eve, but just as it was about to hit a golden haze shot up in front of her and caused the grenade to explode on it. She was momentarily dumbfounded until she saw Wally standing next to her with his arm with the bulge raised and a gold aura coming out of it.

"Thanks, Wally," she said, relieved he had been there to save her, just as he always had been.

"It is fine," he replied. "As long as you are sa-"

"Watch out, Evelyn!" the Arbiter suddenly warned them.

The next thing they knew, a large creature was pounding on the shield and pushing Wally and Eve, who had somehow become part of the shield's interior and was moving with it, towards the back of the tunnel. It was the Brute who had been carrying the Brute shot and he had decided to go berserk to try and kill them. The Arbiter aimed his carbine at the Brute but just as he was about to fire another Brute charged towards him and slammed him against the wall, clutching his weapon with his sharp claws. The two began a fierce fight of strength in an attempt to overpower the other and, very quickly, the Brute was beginning to gain the upper hand in this battle against the Arbiter.

Meanwhile, back at the other end of the elevator, the berserking Brute was effortlessly pounding away at Wally's shield and pushing him and Eve further towards the back of the tunnel; each impact making him shake and fall more onto his knees. Eve tried to hold him up but it was no use and, looking over at the Arbiter for any sign of help she quickly saw that he too was occupied with one of the Brutes.

\_Looks like it's up to me \_she told herself mentally and took out her



energy sword.

She dived out of the shield and activated her energy sword. The Brute roared in surprise at her sudden move and swung his fist at her. She ducked and replied with a swing from her energy sword but he too jumped away, narrowly avoiding it.

"Ha! You cannot kill me, demon!" he taunted her, but she was unhindered.

"I don't need to," she replied smarmily and quickly fired a few blasts at the Brute wrestling with the Arbiter.

They struck him in the back and Brute roared in pain, causing him to let go of the carbine. The Arbiter quickly punched him in the face and fired a shot at him, killing him. Then he turned his weapon up and fired two shots at the Brute who had jumped away from Eve, hitting him in the head and killing him.

"Thanks, Arbiter," Eve thanked him, but then a look of terror suddenly came across her face. "Watch out!" she warned him.

At that exact moment, the air seemed to explode around the Arbiter and like a rag doll he was thrown aside into the back wall of the tunnel as if he had been impacted by a car. Groaning, he fell to the elevator floor; the pain flaring up his side from the impact.

Eve, however, was filled with terror as she backed away into the wall, her eyes locked on the Brute dressed in red armour who was charging towards her with a gravity hammer in his hands. A look of utmost anger lingered in his eyes, his hands raring to swing the weapon at her and kill her outright. She was panicking and trapped. She was an easy target.

Just as he went to strike, Eve was suddenly pulled up so quickly that she was a blur and the gravity hammer slammed into the rock wall, breaking off several large chunks of the tunnel wall; stone being scattered across the elevator. Surprised in an angry way, he looked up to see Wally holding Eve by the arms; both of them hovering about twenty feet above him.

"You traitor, Oracle!" the Brute roared up at him, fury blazing in his eyes. "You dare side with the demon?! You should have been killed when the Prophets were still alive on the great Jou-AH!"

He was cut off mid-sentence and fell to the floor when the sound of more carbine shots filled the air. At first, Wally and Eve thought it was the Arbiter but when they looked over at him they saw him getting to his feet and his weapon laying a few meters from him. There was no way he could have fired on them, but if it had not been him then who was it?

"Arbiter, are you unhurt?" a deep voice asked from the tunnel entrance.

Three tall bulky figures ran into the cave, all wearing dark blue armour. Minor Elites. Eve and Wally both mentally breathed a sigh of relief. They were safe, at last.

"I am fine," he replied, picking up his carbine and looking over at

Eve and Wally as they touched down on the elevator. "Evelyn, Oracle, are you two alright?" he asked them.

They nodded. "Yes, we are fine," Wally told him.

"Good," one of the minor Elites said. "Then we must take our leave, quickly. We have just received word more Brute phantoms are approaching. The phantom is waiting outside,"

The Elites turned and ran out of the cave into the tunnel; their three allies following behind them. Ahead at the other end of the tunnel was a large entrance that let in a flood of daylight but also revealed to Eve, Wally and the Arbiter a view of the battlefield that the Elites and Brutes had been fighting over. Bodies, mostly Brute and their allies, were strewn across the ground, remains of turret emplacements left as burning hulks, along with several anti-air wraiths and ghosts the Brutes had manufactured, and clouds of smoke rose into the air. It looked as if the entire area had just been bombed.

As the group emerged outside, one of the Elites pointed to a phantom hovering nearby a few feet off the ground, its side opened up completely and they ran over to it. Vadumee was standing on the edge of the craft's inside waiting for them, one hand clutching a small railing on the wall to keep him balanced.

"Hurry, quickly!" he was urging them, his voice clearly telling them he wanted to leave.

They boarded one-by-one and when the Arbiter, the last of the group climbed onto the ship, it lifted up into the air; the side closing up completely and quickly flying off into the clouds, disappearing into them for protection.

The Arbiter patted Vadumee on the shoulder. "Thank you, brother, for staying behind,"

"I was not going to leave my men behind," he replied, looking past the Arbiter at Wally and Eve, (who had Auto on her shoulder), were embracing tightly, relieved they were finally free of the Brutes and that Wally was safe at last. "It seems they are finished here,"

The Arbiter sighed heavily, a wave of anxiety sweeping over him like a wave falling onto the shoreline.

"Yes. Now that they are together once again, they shall wish to leave," he muttered lowly. "If only there was a way to prevent that,"

"Let us hope there will be," Vadumee, who had overheard him, replied, turning away from the wall, his eyes still fixed on the two. "For now, let us leave and get back to our base. There is no doubt the Brutes shall wish to strike back hard at us for what we have done today,"

## 17. New arrivals

**\*\*Later that night\*\***

Even though she was on an extra-terrestrial world crawling with beings that were completely strange to her and most of those on this world were out trying to kill her, Eve had to admit that it was amazing how such peaceful scenery could manifest itself even when she was no longer on her home world. Right now, she was lying down on the side of a small hill with her back against the grass and dirt below her staring up at the ever-stretching blackness that was filled with trillions upon trillions of stars that emanated this feeling of beauty and peace from it to the world of Sanghelios below.

A quiet sigh passed her lips as she lay there, admiring the beauty of them, feeling as if they were coaxing her to come and join them. That was something she had always wished to do, particularly when she was very young. Of course, years ago even before the war she had been exploring many of them, in fact even now she was among them from her own home world but still they looked beautiful and tranquil all the same; probably being the only thing that every part of the universe had in common when one looked up at it from their home world(s). Eve especially enjoyed this feeling because it just seemed to be her only company when she was out here. Of course in the past when she would be exploring extra-terrestrial worlds she had her friends with her but now the stars were here only company to give her comfort and hope in not giving up as she almost had done after the end of the war.

Wellâ€|they were \_almost \_her only company as she had an old friend with her and Auto and right now he was lying next to her. Turning her head, she saw Wally with his arms placed against his sides, feet together and eyes staring up at the sky, giving him the look as if he was a statue that had been left to be worn away by nature. Then, as if he had come to life all of a sudden, he turned his head to face Eve and smiled at her. She returned the expression.

"I cannot imagine a more beautiful moment, Eve," he said to her.

She gave a small nod in reply and looked back up at the sky. "Yeah," she agreed with a sigh. "You know, last time I remember being in a sort of scene like this was when you left Earth five years ago," she told him.

At this point, Auto's avatar appeared on the front of her shoulder and sat down on it.

"It was definitely something to remember then," he added, looking up at the sky with them.

Wally let out a small laugh, remembering that day when he had last seen Eve before now. It had been such a peaceful moment after they had paid their respects to the fallen UNSC and Elites that had died in the war against the Covenant. But what he remembered, and enjoyed most of all about that day was when he and Eve had hugged, held hands and kissed, for the second time since they had known each other and the first when they were not involved in a war zone of any sort. The only thing was that it did not last forever because he had to leave, but they had promised each other they would see one another again and now here they were in a small field of grass in one of the many villages scattered across Sanghelios, all three of them thinking of one thing: home.

Of course, they now had the problem of getting back there. The hard

landing of Eve and Auto on the planet a few days ago had been unexpected and that was their only way to leave Sanghelios. The only two other options were to either ask the Elites for a ship off the planet or to try and steal one from the Brutes, but Eve had mentally kicked herself when both of those thoughts came to her. The former: fat chance with the realisation yesterday that the Arbiter and the Elites wanted her to be drawn into the conflict with that attack on the temple, and the latter: that sounded more practical but the problem was that the Brutes would be on high alert now they knew she was here and plus they had no idea where the nearest Brute base was. Basically, overall, they were stuck here.

"So what is your plan now, Eve?" Wally asked her after a moment's silence between them, turning his head over to look at her and she looked back at him. "Well, now that you have freed me," he added, so as to remove any confusion.

"Well, to go home with you," she replied in a hopeful tone, sitting up and bringing her knees up to her chest and embracing them, resting her head on them. "Problem is, I don't know how we're gonna do it. There's no way we can leave,"

"Maybe I could hot wire one of the Elites' ships," Auto suggested.

For a moment, Eve pondered over his suggestion; a small sigh passing her lips. On the one hand it did sound achievable but again it was compounded by the fact that they had no idea where the nearest airfields were and even if they did find a ship there, or if by some miracle they found one in the village, the Elites would very likely try and stop them.

She shook her head after several moments. "No, it's not worth it," she replied, lying back down on the ground and exhaling deeply in a sad manner.

Wally looked at her sorrowfully; knowing very well that she was fed up. She had fought so hard to come here and rescue him and now she wanted to go home, but right now there was no way that was happening. He sighed and moved up close to her and, lying down next to her, embraced her tightly. She smiled and rested her head on his shoulder, letting out a gentle soothing breath that felt warm on Wally's neck.

"Thanks, Wally," she said softly to him, her blue eyes looking up at his hazel coloured eyes, soaking in the warmth and comfort that seemed to radiate from them to her; easing her anxiety and letting her know that all was not lost, that there was still a possible chance for them to get home.

Seconds ticked by as they lay there, the light wind of the night making the grass and leaves in the trees around them rustle loudly. A warm feeling fell over them, and they probably would have fallen asleep in this embrace if Wally had not sat up and pulled Eve with him; her head still resting on his shoulder. Auto sat down on her shoulder, grasping the uniform around where he was to stop himself from falling off.

"Wally?" Eve suddenly inquired, moving away from his shoulder and looking straight into his hazel eyes. "Can I ask you something?" she

said the last sentence with a tone of concern.

He looked at her with a puzzled expression. "Of course. What is it, Eve?" he asked her, turning his body to face her.

"When you were in the mountain, just before I came in and rescued you; why did you scream all of a sudden?" she asked him. "I mean, that Brute reacted too quickly for him to do any harm to you," she added.

Wally did not answer, but just looked half-down at the ground with a slightly confused expression on his face, as if he did not understand what she was asking him. Of course he did, but he himself could not be entirely sure if what had made him scream out was true or not. He may have been hallucinating or just seeing things but it did scare him.

"Well," he began, pondering about how to explain it. "I had been deteriorating in my condition ever since they had captured me and when I heard shooting outside my prison I knew that help had finally come. But then as I tried to wake up I saw something in front of me,"

"What was it?" Eve asked.

"Well, I could not see very well because it had suddenly become extremely dark, so much so that I could not even see the Brute that was assigned to guard me. Then, a figure in a black hood appeared to me and suddenly grabbed my arm. From that touch, I felt like my arm was being consumed by fire. Then, of course, the Brute attacked me and then went out to deal with you and well that is it,"

Eve turned her head to look down at the ground for a moment, pondering over what had been said to her. Her mind was pointing directly to the hospital experience she had had back on Earth, when she had seen that that man or thing or whatever it was talking to her. It, or he as it had a deep voice like a man, had told her to come here in the first place and now Wally had seen it as well. There was no doubt that there was some kind of connection here between them and this thing, but what?

"Are you alright, Eve?" Auto asked her, snapping her back into reality and turning her head to look up at him and then at Wally who was looking at her with a concerned expression on his face.

"Oh y-yeah, yeah, I'm okay," she replied hastily. "Sorry, I just lost it for a moment there,"

Wally went to reply when footfalls from the other side of the hill reached them and he, Eve and Auto turned their heads in the direction of the noise to see a tall, bulky figure approaching them. The darkness hid his identity at first but then he held up his hand and a sort of clear ball-like device lit up the surrounding area with a light blue aura, momentarily blinding them until the light dimmed slightly and enabled them to look at the figure, who was an Elite with red armour.

"Evelyn, Oracle, you must come quick!" he said to them.

"What is it?" Eve asked with a concerned tone. "What's going

on?"

"Humans have arrived in the village and they are here for you."

## 18. Confrontation

**\*\*Several minutes later\*\***

**\*\*Back in Sactra village \*\***

All sorts of questions were running through Eve's mind as the major Elite led her and Wally into the village towards the large cone shaped structure that she had found herself in when she had awoken after crashing onto the planet. Why were they here? How did they get here in the first place? Would they go back to Earth, or were they the 'help' that the Arbiter and Vadumee had requested days ago?

Or was it her? As they were led into the structure and towards and up a spiralling staircase, Eve began to think of when she was back at the base on Earth. There was no doubt Hood would have been caught and told that soldiers would be sent after her, and her being here on Sanghelios putting to and two together it made perfect sense. They were likely to be here for her.

Of course, as they reached the corridor outside the room where she had woken up in with Zuka over her, there was then the question of who was here for her and how many there were. In a way, though, she began to feel glad of them coming here. She and Wally could finally leave here and go back to Earth, they would be together again! Oh, looks like her luck is finally starting to turn for the better again.

"This way," the major Elite said to them, pushing aside the curtain as he entered the room and holding it up to allow them to pass.

"Well, well, well, look who's here at last!"

Or so Eve thought.

Standing in front of her were a group of humans, all of them dressed in ODS'T attire, though on each of their armour covering their forearms was a small skull with a pair of bones crossing each other underneath. Upon seeing it, Eve bit her lip and looked up at the lead ODS'T. He was tall, about the same height as her, and had brown hair, brown eyes, broad shoulders and was wielding a battle rifle. His heavy armour only broadened his physically fit appearance, really giving him an intimidating look. Seeing him only made Eve think of disgust and anger, knowing this ODS'T very well. The Arbiter and Vadumee were standing to the right of them, their eyes looking at her and Wally as they entered the room.

The other five ODS'T's all stared at her with relieved and appreciative expressions, only increasing her nervousness even more. "Well, this mission was quick," one of them said happily with a tone that made Eve sick with disgust. It was obvious he was interested in her, so to speak.

"That it was," the leading ODS'T replied, walking over to Eve. "It's good to see you, Eve. Thought we'd be here for a while looking for ya."

"I can't say the same about you, Tysen," she replied with a clear tone of dislike. "Just when I thought my time on this planet couldn't get any worse; \_you \_of all people had to show,"

Tysen just chuckled. "Still sarcastic, but that's what I like about you, Eve." The other ODS'T's chuckled as well as Tysen looked over to Wally, who was standing next to Eve, and he eyed him suspiciously. "Where do I know you from?" he asked him.

"I'mâ€|I'm from Installation 04, I was the monitor there," Wally replied, but Tysen gave him a confused look.

"What? Where is thisâ€|Installation 04 that you're going on about?" he asked.

"He means the Halo rings," she answered him bluntly, only attracting an annoyed look from Tysen. "What are you doing here anyway, Tysen?" she demanded. "If \_you're\_ taking me back, you can think again!" she added in a snapping tone.

He smiled when he heard these words. "Well, Eve, whether you like it or not, you're gonna have to come back with us. Our bosses, Michael and Richard, want you back on Earth as soon as possible,"

Eve groaned when she heard this, no doubt having heard about the two hated and repulsive politicians at New Mombassa II. They wanted her to come back? Wellâ€|they sure as hell had another thing coming.

"You want me to come back with you?" she repeated and shook her head. "How about no?! You can tell Michael and Richard that I'm not going anywhere with you and I'm not coming back to Earth to fall into their hands."

Tysen only chuckled again, as did several of the other ODS'T's. "Eve, I don't think you know the severity of the situation," one of them, a 6ft blonde haired, green eyed man, said to her. "We're the only way you're getting back to Earth, so you can either come back with us or you can be left here with a war going on,"

Eve went silent for a moment, realisation hitting her as if she had been struck with a sledgehammer. That Skulls ODS'T, as much as she hated to admit it, was right; she \_was going to miss out\_ on possibly her only chance to get back to Earth, to go back to a life she knew where she and Wally would be safe. It was excruciating but true, and she did not like it one bit.

Tysen looked back over his shoulder at the others. "Dunno why you're saying that, Gerald," he told him and looked back at Eve with a nasty grin. "She'll be coming back with us whether she likes it or not,"

Eve glared at him. Wally looked shocked. The Arbiter and Vadumee looked at each other nervously, apprehensive about what would transpire next. After a moment of silence, the Arbiter stepped

forward.

"If she does not want to go with you, then you should not force her," he told Tysen, but only received a narrow-eyed look in return.

"I don't see your name getting involved here, split lip!" he snapped at Arbiter vehemently. The major Elite and Vadumee as well as the Arbiter, glared at him but Tysen and the other ODS'T's were undeterred. "She's coming back with us whether she or you guys want her to or not!" he turned back to Eve. "C'mon, Eve, we're going now!"

He and two other ODS'T's advanced towards her, ready to grab her and restrain her. Eve stood at an almost battle stance, bending her arms at the elbows, legs forward at the knees and curling her hands into fists, ready to defend herself. Tysen only grinned, as did the other two ODS'T's.

All of a sudden, Wally stepped in front of her, his hazel coloured eyes staring directly into Tysen's brown eyes but not with a firmness or a look of pleading or fear, but simple blankness that was enough to tell the ODS'T's \_'You're not taking her away against her will!'  
\_Tysen glared at him.

"Listen, man, I don't want any trouble, so move and we'll settle this peacefully." He told Wally.

"No, I will not move," he replied calmly, but with a sense of firmness in his voice. "Please do not take her!"

"I'm not gonna tell you again; \_get out of my way\_" Tysen barked, but Wally ignored him and refused to move.

"Look, stop this before it gets out of hand!" Vadumee piped up firmly, trying to take control of the situation but Tysen held up his hand.

"Stay outta this, split-lip!" he snapped.

Vadumee growled and walked over to him, his enormous bulky figure raring to break Tysen in two. "Do! Not! Call! Me! That! Name!" he snarled angrily.

"Then don't get involved," the blonde haired ODS'T intervened, getting between Tysen and Vadumee; the former turning back to Wally, who now had Eve standing alongside him.

"Eve, last chance; come with us now or we will restrain you and take you back by force!" he warned her, but she shook her head.

"And I'll give you the same answer, Tysen!" she retorted sordidly, stepping up to him and poking him in the chest. "You can tell Richard and Michael and anyone else that's in on this to get a life! Besides, Hood'll stop you!"

Tysen chuckled. "He won't be able to protect you at the moment, Eve! He's under house arrest for co-operating in your escape! Now!" All of a sudden, he grabbed her and struggled to wrap his arms around hers and pin them behind her back. "You're coming with us whether you like it or not!" he shouted to her.



Eve struggled violently and Tysen quickly found his grip on her breaking. Wally also intervened and tried to pry his hands loose from her arms.

"No, let her go!" he demanded vociferously. "You are going to hurt her!"

"Shut up and stay out of this!" he shouted at Wally as the blonde haired ODST and a third member of the group rushed over and grabbed hold of him and pulled him away.

One of them held him back whilst the other punched him as hard as he could in the stomach, winding him. Tysen cackled madly but Eve, who upon seeing this, flipped.

"That's it, Tysen!" she screeched and, wrestling her arm free, swung a punch at his face, crashing into his nose so hard that for a millisecond the sound of a crack filled the room; the move itself startling the other ODST's as well as the major Elite and Vadumee.

Tysen cried out, releasing his grip on her, and staggered back, clapping his nose with both hands. The two ODST's holding Wally immediately released their grip on him, nervous of what might happen to them, and backed away. All eyes momentarily fell on Eve, who stood rooted to the spot for a moment, fist curled as tight as it would go, chest rising and falling heavily accompanied by heavy breaths, her blue eyes locked onto Tysen with an eagle-like glare. He looked back up at her with an equal-looking expression but stayed where he was, nursing his injury.

Eve, after a moment, rushed over to Wally, who coughed as he struggled to regain his breathing. Other than that blow to the stomach, he was okay.

"Tha-thank you, Eve," he said to her as she put her arm around him and led him over to the bed she had woken up on days ago and sat him down.

Tysen, still placing one hand over his now bloody face, letting the other, which was also covered in blood, fall by his side, looked over at them.

"That's wasn't a smart thing to do, Eve!" he said to her firmly, but she was undeterred.

"Neither was you trying to take me away!" She snapped back. "If I were you, I'd get back on your ship and go before it's too late and you get hurt again!"

He glared at her and went to step forward towards her, but this time the Arbiter stepped in front of him, a firm expression lingering in his eyes. "Alright, that is enough!" he barked, hoping to stop any further confrontation. "Go back to your ship," he told Tysen, who responded with another glare and then turned his gaze to Eve.

"Now, Tysen!" the Arbiter growled, this time his voice more vehement than before.

Tysen only glared back at him and then back at Eve before pointing a finger from his free hand at her and snarling: "This isn't over, Eve! We'll get you for this! Mark my words, you're gonna be sorry when we get you back to Earth!"

She only glared back at him before the Arbiter, Vadumee and the major Elite ushered him and the other ODS's out of the room. When they were gone, Eve groaned and slapped her hand onto her face, sinking down onto her knees. Wally embraced her tightly and she did the same to him.

"Well, that wasâ€|really tense!" Auto commented as his avatar appeared on her shoulder.

Eve mumbled something, but her mouth was covered by Wally's chest so it was muffled to the two men. She felt helpless, completely and utterly helpless! What had just transpired had certainly sealed her fate here for the time being. This was just perfect, absolutely, bloody perfect!

"I can't believe it!" she said sadly as she released herself from Wally's embrace and sitting on the floor. "Now I'm stuck here! Damn Tysen and Richard and Michael! They've all screwed me over and now we're all stuck here as a result! I justâ€|justâ€|oh!"

She buried her face in her hands and began to cry. Wally embraced her again and led her onto the bed, sitting her down on and placing himself next to her.

"Eve," he said in a comforting tone, lifting her head up from her hands with his, revealing her tear soaked face and the sadness and pain that lingered in her eyes that almost made his own heart break. "No matter what happens, I will be here for you. You know that. I am happy just to be with you again and if we stay here, thenâ€|then I will protect you, just as we did with each other years ago,"

She sniffed and wiped her eyes, touched by his kind words. She even managed to put on a small smile. "Thanks, Wally," and embraced him again, finally allowing herself a release of the pain and anguish that had come to her tonight.

What was to happen now was to be a mystery in the minds of anyone.

**\*\*Author's note: Greetings FF readers and writers. I apologize for the long absence, but college work and other priorities occupied my time. I am, however, free from all that now and so I can update as I please. Look forward to other updates in future. \*\***

## 19. Something new?

**\*\*The next day\*\***

**\*\*Brute mining base and HQ on Sanghelios, seventy miles east of Sactra village\*\***

As with every day dawning on Earth the jungle had awoken to a bright sunrise over a yellowy/brownish sky, bringing with the wave of humidity and stuffiness that reminded Eve of when she had been in

Guatemala years ago during the Covenant invasion of Earth. Then, as the morning on a storm had brewed and burst over the jungles, quickly drenching the landscape and forcing all life to make a run for cover to escape the rain. It was a blessing for the fauna of where it opened but for the wildlife it was a curse, though for the Elites it did have a silver lining to it: the Brutes never really liked to fight in bad weather and so this would enable a greater chance of success in striking back at them.

And at this exact moment, moving through the thick undergrowth of the jungle, that is what the Elites were doing. The Arbiter, Vadumee and about one hundred other Elites, a mixture of minor, major, zealot and stealth, came to a halt at the edge of the undergrowth where an open space of a hundred metres lay in front of them before it stopped at the base of the mountain where several scattered stone buildings were placed; their Brute, Jackal and Grunt occupiers lumbering about, all of them completely oblivious to the threat nearby. The Arbiter, wielding a plasma rifle in his hand and having an energy sword activator attached to his belt, gazed at them through a hole in the bush he was behind; the noise of the rustling making his pause for a second for fear of being spotted.

Their target was this mining base as well as this headquarters within the mountain ahead of them, where it was rumoured that the Brutes had an enormous subterranean base constructed into something that existed there already, though exactly what was unknown. In fact, most Elites had begun to even question the authenticity of the likelihood of the base even being there, though the Arbiter, Eve and Wally had pressed that it was likely that they were true and that the so-called subterranean base was likely to be Forerunner in origin due to their past experiences of them elsewhere on Earth, the Halo rings and on the Ark. Last night, an attack was agreed upon and planned and, well this was the result of it so far. Right now, however, despite having a lot of cover to shield them from any prying eyes, there was the constant fear that they would be spotted; if not by sight then by sound as a force of about eighty odd soldiers moving through the jungle was in no way quiet.

Luckily for them, however, something else quickly made an appearance as well. Overhead, the skies were dark once again and almost immediately, a flash of lightning lit up the sky for a millisecond, followed moment later by the loud rumble of thunder. Rain began to fall as soon as the noise of the rumble had subsided, quickly becoming a heavy downpour and filling the air with a new sound of continuous tapping as if there was an enormous audience of several thousand people all applauding at the same time. Another rumble of thunder from somewhere distant followed.

"Well, that certainly is an example of battle weather," a male voice to the Arbiter's right commented sarcastically. He looked to see Eve standing next to him and Wally next to her; Auto, who had made the comment, standing on her shoulder furthest from the Arbiter. "Still, at least the Brutes are heading inside," he pointed out.

The Arbiter looked and saw Auto was correct: the Brutes were barking at the Grunts and Jackals to go into the buildings or into the mountain; the entrance to it being a few small caves that were obscured from view behind the stone buildings. Some of the Grunts groaned in annoyance at having to go back inside but the Brutes simply growled or barked at them in their native language, which

managed to hustle their smaller 'comrades' inside.

With a 'hmm', the Arbiter turned his head to Vadumee standing a few feet from him.

"Prepare for an attack on the Brutes head on," he told him. "Me, Evelyn and the Oracle will run for the caves as soon as they return fire on your position."

His fellow, silver armoured Elite nodded. "Very well. Good luck, all of you," he replied and motioned for the other soldiers around them to move up to where the jungle met the wasteland; the Elites readying their weapons for the coming fight.

The Arbiter tapped Wally and Eve on the shoulders and motioned for them to follow him; which they did, going along the line of undergrowth until it came to a kind of curve that led towards the mountain but came to a halt about fifty feet from it. Directly opposite them at the base of the mountain was a small rock fall. Quickly glancing left and right, they ran across the wasteland gap to the rock fall, throwing themselves behind the rocks when they reached them. The Arbiter poked his head out from behind the rocks, looking over at where Vadumee and the others were. One of the minor Elites, at the end of the line of undergrowth where they were positioned, waved his hand and gave them the thumbs up. The Arbiter returned the motion and knelt back down behind the boulder.

"Alright, be ready. They will start attacking in a moment," he told them, grabbing his energy sword activator and, with the press of a button on the back of the device, the foot long energetic blade shot out of it in the blink of an eye, the crackle of electricity filling their ears as the rain from above hit the weapon and making it hiss.

Behind them over a few hundred feet away, Vadumee motioned for two major Elites to step forward, both of them wielding plasma cannons. He pointed to a stone building where a Brute lumbered into view, his head nonchalantly turning left to right in extreme boredom, an equal expression on its face at not having anything to do apart from this pointless guarding or a base that was nowhere near the frontlines; them being about forty miles to the west.

"Prepare to fire," Vadumee ordered. "The chieftain will order them out of the mountain to protect their base and that will enable the Arbiter, Evelyn and the Oracle to sneak into the mountain." He added.

They two nodded and, loading the explosive cartridges into the weapons, stepped forward, partially revealing themselves on the edge of the undergrowth where it met the wasteland. They aimed them at the stone building and placing their fingers on the firing mechanisms, their own pleasure of killing Brutes and other Covenant filling their minds. Both knelt, aimed and, with a quiet "Fire!" order from Vadumee behind them, pulled the triggers; the force of the cannon shots exiting the weapons forcing them backwards into the undergrowth.

Meanwhile, the Brute standing at the building, sighed through gritted teeth, bored almost to tears. There was nothing to do! Nothing at all! The only thing that he could do to amuse himself was bully and

harass the Grunts, but he had gotten tired of that and was now left out here with many of his comrades in some pathetic mountain in the pouring rain whilst many other Grunts inside were left to dig away atâ€|well, something underground. Maybe that did not sound very appealing but at least they were dry, \_and not near him\_ so he could not harass them.

"Useless whelps!" he muttered angrily under his breath as he turned to walk back behind the building where it would offer some shelter from the rain, which still fell but was at least beginning to lessen now.

Just then, he stopped dead as he witnessed two plasma shots flying towards him at an incredibly fast speed. He barely even had time to roar as they slammed into him with an almighty explosion that partially destroyed the wall of the stone building he had been standing next to; the green lights from the impact lighting up the area in a fireball.

Nearby, the Arbiter, Eve and Wally, who had covered their ears in readiness for the explosion, looked out from where they were hiding to assess the damage caused by their allies.

"D'you think that'll draw them out?" Auto, who was standing on Eve's shoulder, asked hesitantly.

He quickly got his answer when a loud roar emanated from the direction of the caves that led into the mountain and wave after wave of Brutes, Grunts and Jackals poured out of the caves and began firing on the jungle; to which the Elites hiding in the undergrowth returned fire, killing several of the Brutes and their 'allies'. One of the leading Brute captains shouted something and charged forward, a gravity hammer in his hands; the rest of the small army following close behind. The four behind the boulder watched as the gunfire and shouting of the battle entered the forest with the Brutes leading the attack. This was it, now was their chance.

"Now, quickly! Before they see us!" the Arbiter ordered, getting up and rushing out from behind the boulder.

"Arbiter, wait!" Wally called nervously from behind. The Elite stopped and looked over his shoulder to see Eve still sitting on the ground, her arms wrapped around her chest and her eyes looking directly ahead as if she was in some kind of trance. Her body shook as if she was cold, which was odd considering the weather at the time of day. "Eve, are you alright?" Wally asked her worryingly as he shook her a little.

"Evelyn, what is wrong?" the Arbiter asked, his voice frantic at them being spotted by the Brutes at any moment if they stayed out here much longer.

All eyes were on her as Auto tapped her face with his hand, trying to get her attention, but it did not seem to work, she just stared on. Her eyes were like two empty holes in her head, seeing nothing but a still image of the world as if all had been frozen in time, never to awaken again from an eternal still slumber. Within her, however, particularly her mind, she began to feel different, as if she was being watched by something, or someone she had seen before. Not Wally or Auto or the Arbiter, butâ€|but justâ€|something that was entirely

different, that did not fit anything or anyone she knew regularly.

"Eve?" a voice called out to her faintly though it began to grow louder with each passing second. "Eve?! Eve!"

With a gasp, her sight returned to normal and she looked up to see Wally and the Arbiter standing over her with concerned expressions on their faces. Auto, too, was looking at her with a perplexed gaze, though the concern and worry was visible in his eyes as well.

"Iâ€¦I'm sorry," she said quickly, getting up and picking up her weapons. She turned to walk in the direction of the caves but was stopped by the continued looks of confusion and concern that the Arbiter, Wally and Auto were giving her. "What?!" she snapped firmly. "What are you guys waiting for? Go, c'mon!"

For a moment longer, the Arbiter continued to eye her suspiciously akin to a man sizing up someone he had not seen before and immediately did not trust. Then, deciding it was best to take the initiative now whilst they had it, he turned and ran in the direction of the caves, Wally and Eve following close behind.

As they went, Eve suddenly squeezed her shoulder, making Auto's avatar disappear before he could comprehend what she was doing, and when the data cord rose up on her shoulder, she handed it to Wally, who took it hesitantly.

"Keep him safe," she told him when they reached the caves; the Arbiter stopping them for a moment when they reached the stone buildings to glance out at the battle raging nearby just to make sure they had not been seen. "I don't want anything to happen to him after what just happened to Me." She added to her Forerunner/Human lover.

Wally tried to reply, but her tone of voice and this decision of hers to have him look after Autoâ€¦well, it just startled him. Why was she doing this? Was sheâ€¦expecting something to happen to them? Or to her maybe? It just did not make any sense.

They stopped next to a large cave that led deep into the mountain's base; the Arbiter stepping forward and poking his head inside to check and see if there were any guards. There were several lights planted along the sides of the cave to light up the path as it went into a left curve. There were no guards also, which was equally pleasing. So far so good.

"Come, quickly!" he said to the two behind him and led them into the cave; the light of day quickly disappearing behind them as the darkness of the cave enveloped them into uncertainty.

Nearby away from the gunfire, a tall ODST looked through his sniper rifle's scope with a sense of satisfaction. Five others were with him, gathered around as if they were at a meeting. It was Tysen and his squad of ODST's.

Tysen, who was holding the sniper rifle, smiled approvingly as he lowered the weapon. "Good, now we know we can corner her and take her back," he said, rubbing his nose a little; the action making him

wince. It still hurt even though the ship's medical equipment had fixed it in a matter of seconds but a little pain was the consequence of such advanced medical technology.

"Why can't we just stun her or shoot at her until she gives up?" one of the ODST, a medium height browned haired man with green eyes, suggested.

"Eve's now the one to give up easily," the blonde haired ODST told his friend. "Besides, it's not a good idea to do anything else apart from restraining her." He added with a low tone, hinting his annoyance.

"Exactly," Tysen intervened with an icy tone. "That bitch deserves to pay for what she did to me last night, but we have orders and we screw them up then it's all our heads! Keep that in mind guys," he told the rest of the group and glanced over to the jungle to his top-right, taking in the noise of the gunfire and shouting that was beginning to draw closer to the mountain again.

"Sounds like the Brutes are losing," Tysen muttered in a concerned tone, but still he held his wits. "Alright, c'mon, we better hurry unless we wanna get caught in another intergalactic war."

Moving quickly, he led them across the wastelands, past the buildings and into the mountain, though each were uncertain of how their retrieval of Eve was going to play out.

**\*\*Fifty feet below the surface\*\***

Deep within the subterranean caverns and tunnels that were to be part of the Brute base here, the Brute captains of the digging here overlooked a worker force of about thirty Grunts as they pushed, threw and pulled away the dirt and rocks of the walls that surrounded them in this enormous cavern they had dug out over the last few months; their chieftain believing they were close to the site of their ancient gods. The smell of sweat hung in the air like a cloud and tiredness was rife as well as hunger and thirst.

"Hurry up, you whelps!" one of the Brute captains barked, hitting one of the Grunts over the head with his large hand; making the creature groan in stress as well as sadness at its mistreatment. "We are close to the construction of our gods!"

"If only the prophets were alive now, they would congratulate us amazingly," one commented, looking at the growing hole the Grunts were digging in the wall, hopefully drawing closer to their goal.

A sudden bark from behind made them all jump and the Brutes, along with a few Grunts looked over their shoulders to see their Brute chieftain enter the cavern, still wearing his red armour as well as a look of disapproval on his face as he had just heard of the sudden attack launched onto his base by the Elites. Although they had been driven off, he was still furious, worried even, that they had managed to locate this base, which made the possibility of a future attack ever more likely.

"How far do we have left?" he asked one of the captains in a frustrated tone.

"Not far, sir," he replied, nodding at the excavation work by the Grunts. "We are almost there, just a few more metres."

"Good," the chieftain replied bluntly. Then, as he looked back at the Grunts, a look of rage etched across his features and exploded out of him like a supernova. "You there!" he bellowed loudly at one of the workers, startling the other twenty nine Grunts as well as some of his captains, as it paused to wipe the perspiration off of its forehead. "I did not tell you to halt in your work, you whelp!" and with that he whipped out his shiny red Brute plasma rifle and fired at the Grunt, killing him. "Get back to work, all of you!" he barked vociferously; the Grunts doing so immediately.

As the chieftain lowered his weapon, muttering an invective about the Grunts to one of his captains, they failed to notice the moving shadow in the cave behind them.

**\*\*Nearby within the cave system\*\***

Deeper and further they went the more eerie and uneasy the Arbiter, Eve, Auto (who was now sitting on Wally's shoulder; the former having to explain the sudden decision of why Eve had given the avatar to him) and Wally felt. Literally, they felt the very air become tense with the fact that they knew little of what was awaiting them within these caves. Grunts, Jackals, Brutes, turrets, dead ends, all of them lingered in their minds, but still they pressed on regardless. Their fear was something they had to keep control of, lest they wanted it to lure them from their mission in finding this 'Forerunner' location in the mountain.

"How much further do we have to go, Arbiter?" Eve asked the Elite as they headed further down the cave, the lights placed along the walls giving them some comfort from the darkness that largely surrounded them like a blanket.

"I pray not too far left, Evelyn," he replied, glancing his head left and right as if he were afraid that something was going to suddenly materialize out of the walls and attack them. "What I am surprised of, though, is that we have not run into any resistance as of yet."

"So am I," she replied, concerned. "D'you think all of them left to fight off the Elites?" she inquired.

"It's possible, but I would not hold my breath,"

"Guys!" Auto suddenly exclaimed from Wally's shoulder, drawing the attention of all three. "We're close, really close! The Forerunner location is down the next cave!"

Upon hearing this, a sense of determination and fulfilment filled them like water filling up a tank. Finally, it seemed, they were going to discover some meaning to the Brute presence here! What exactly, though, they did not know but it was better they found it first than the Brutes.

"Quickly, then! We must go!" the Arbiter ordered, running ahead down the cave and turning right; the others following close behind.

It was when they were about three quarters of the way down the last



cave when they suddenly screeched to a halt at the sound ofâ€|blast fire? Andâ€|screams and barks and shouts that were Brutish in origin? Yesâ€|yes, that is what they were, butâ€|why down here? More importantly: why at all could they hear these sounds? Had another Elite unit gotten ahead of them without the rest of the force here knowing?

"Auto, what is that?" Eve asked him.

"Scanning," he replied, placing a hand to his head, but he shook it after a second, his face one of utter confusion. "I-I don't know. I can't pick up anything. It's likeâ€|it's like they've got some kind of shielding device or something that disables my ability to locate and identify sounds that are unusual."

With a 'hmm', the Arbiter spoke up. "Ready your weapons," he told them with a voice filled with caution. "We could be facing a serious threat," he added.

Eve took out her plasma rifle, keeping it close, whilst pulling Wally over to her. "Don't worry, we'll be alright," she told him and Auto.

"You know I will protect you, Eve," he told her.

"I know you will," she replied, touched by his care for her.

"Come, quickly," the Arbiter said, leading them down the cave to the end towards a large dug out entrance to another cavern.

When they reached it, a sight of pure sickness greeted them; reminding Eve of when she had entered that structure on the first Halo ring ears ago. All over the cavern were the bodies of the Brutes and Grunts; each of them having their blood splattered over the walls and floor as if it had been thrown around like paint. Some had been smashed together whilst others appear to have been struck fatal blows of some kind. The stench of death hung in the air like smog, choking them with an unbeatable feeling of wanting to gag and be sick.

What really drew the four's attention, however, was a large hole opposite them a few feet lower by the terms of the floor, the majority of the bodies of the Grunts lying in front of it, which told them they had been digging it when they had died byâ€|well, whatever had killed them. On the other side of the hole was a large black space that they could not see what was inside.

"Isâ€|that it?" Eve asked.

Auto nodded. "That's it, that's the Forerunner location they were trying to get to," he replied. "Wonder what's in it?" he asked curiously.

"Whatever it is, let's be glad the Brutes did not get to it," Eve said. "C'mon."

Leading the way, and having to tread carefully, though Wally just merely hovered alongside them, they moved over to the hole and stepped inside. Total blackness surrounded them until, inexplicably, it suddenly lit up, startling the four. As they she set down next to Eve and the Arbiter, Wally was flabbergasted at the sight he saw

around him.

It was a dome-shaped place with a rock ceiling, meaning it was built into the mountain rather than being separate from it. The walls about half-way down the dome changed from rock to metal and both they and the floor were engraved with Forerunner symbols. Other than that, though, what really surprised them was that there was nothing else in this place, nothing at all. If this was it then: what was its purpose?

As they stepped forward into the place, their eyes scanning every inch of it to ensure nothing would surprise them, a sudden loud cracking noise froze them on the spot and made them look up. Just as they did, a large, bulky shape dropped from the darkness above and fell to the floor in the middle of the room, landing with a thud that broke several pieces of the armour on the creature. Rushing over and pushing it over with his foot, the Arbiter identified it to be the Brute chieftain of the base; the very same one whom he and Eve had encountered days ago in the abandoned temple. His tongue sticking out of his mouth, the purple blood around his lips and cheeks and the bruising around the neck told them that he had been strangled to death.

"Butâ€|by who?" Eve inquired, stunned as she, Wally and Auto all stood over the Arbiter for a closer look at the body.

\*\*\*"By me of course."\*\*

## 20. Metamorphosis

The four looked up at the almost pitch black darkness above them that was the ceiling of this place they were in within the mountain. There, they heard nothing at all, and had equal results with their sight. But that voice, however, was something they all heard, yet it came out of nowhere quite literally. Where was it coming from within this place, however, and, more importantly, who was the owner of it?

THUD! The sound of something dropping came ahead of them, causing all four to now turn their senses towards it. Nothing but darkness was in front of them, pitch black darkness that was barely lit up by the hole that led into this place. Still, though, nothing came out, which only heightened the nerves of the group as they feared that whatever it was that was with them could be ubiquitous in nature.

"Look!" Auto suddenly breathed from Wally's hand, pointing ahead into the darkness.

The others looked and saw the outline of a figure seemingly materialize out of the darkness as it came towards them. It was tall, probably about the height of the Arbiter, and had large thick legs with small growths scattered over them, making the two limbs look like they were infected. Draped over it was a large dirty cloak with a hood that covered the head and torso. Two rotten sleeves hung from the cloak and protruding from them were two thick arms with small but sharp claws like those of an eagle. The face, however, was obscured entirely by the cloak. The footfalls from the figure were light in sound as it approached them, stopping about ten feet from them. Eve and the Arbiter kept their weapons close and Wally grasped Eve's arm

with his hand, ready to fly her away from any danger that this figure might unleash onto them.

For a moment, nobody moved as if they had been frozen in time. Then, Arbiter broke the silence: "What creature are you?" he asked tentatively.

"\*\*I am but the result of a deranged, but unstoppable species," \*\*the figure replied, raising its hands and lowering the hood to reveal the face, which was almost completely human-like but the skin had grown over the right eye and what looked like veins swelling up to bursting point covered the forehead and cheeks. "\*\*You all, however, are the progeny of my foe's false enlightenment.\*\*"

All of a sudden, the eyes of the creature lit up a dark green colour and Wally, Auto and the Arbiter were forced back towards the opening to the place as if they had been pulled back by giant hands. Eve, taken by surprise, went to retaliate at the figure but he merely held up his hand and all of a sudden her arms were forced against the sides of her body, dropping her weapons in the process. Then, she was lifted several inches above the floor and began to hover through no action of her own towards this figure, or thing as she was now mentally calling him. She tried to resist the force holding her arms by her sides but it was no use. It was as if her body was saying: No, you are no longer my master. He is the one in control now.

"What theâ€¦?" she gasped and tried to pull her arm away from her but it was a vain attempt. "Let me go! Put me down!" She caught a horrific stench emanating from his body; it being one of rotting corpses and she coughed loudly, her eyes watering a little from the intense stench.

The figure said nothing. "\*\*Be silent please, Evelyn Knight," \*\*he replied tonelessly. "\*\*You are important and I have no desire to bring harm to you.\*\*"

"Eve!" Wally, who was the first to get up from the floor, exclaimed in fear and, activating his anti-gravity boots, flew towards her, but the figure just looked at him and he was suddenly stopped in his tracks by some invisible barrier. He moved his hands over it frantically to try and find a way through it, as did Auto on the back of his hand, but it was no use. Even the Arbiter, who rushed over to help, had no luck. "Eve!" Wally exclaimed again, aghast.

"Wally!" she cried fearfully, looking back at the figure. "What do you want with me?" she asked but suddenly stopped herself and looked at him closer with her blue eyes, scrutinizing him as her mind turned like a wheel, knowing that she had seen someone, or something like him before but wh-

Then it hit her. "Y-you!" she gasped. "Y-you're theâ€¦the one whoâ€¦who-

"\*\*You are precise in your recollection," \*\*he replied, smiling for the first time, revealing two rows of dark brown/dark green teeth, some of them missing; a few of those within the jaws of the figure being sharp like those one would see within the mouth of a great white. He lowered Eve to the floor and loosened the telekinetic grip on her arms. "\*\*My name is Chromsar. And I have finally attained you

right where I wish you to be."\*\*

Eve looked over her shoulder back at the others, who were still looking helplessly at her and Chromsar, knowing that they could not reach her because of this infernal barrier he had put up between them. For a moment, she thought about rushing over towards them and trying to break out of the barrier herself. She even half turned her foot to do so, but Chromsar stopped her with a small chuckle.

"\*\*If I were you, Evelyn Knight, I would save your strength and relinquish any attempt to break out," \*\*He told her, causing her to look back at him. "\*\*You must observe: I am the one who controls this situation now, like what you call a 'god' as the benefactor of its own creation."\*\*

Eve gulped, the fear of this predicament overwhelming her like a wave falling onto the shore, but she was determined not to submit to it.

"How do youâ€¦|how do you know my name?" she asked Chromsar.

"\*\*I know who you are, Evelyn, Knight, because I have been watching you for some time now, since before you even set foot on this world. As you will recollect, I am the one who brought you here to this world. And I always made sure you were close to me, as you will also recollect."\*\*

Eve began to think back to the last few days since she had been on Sanghelios, and very quickly what Chromsar was saying to her was true! He had been watching her; such as when she, Auto and the Arbiter were going through the jungle to the temple when they believed Wally was being held prisoner there. \_He \_[Chromsar] had been the cause of the terrible, rotting corpse smell they had inhaled; he had been the shape she had briefly seen when they were entering the tunnel andâ€¦|she looked back at Wally and met his gaze. He had said that he had seen something like him before she rescued him, just like her when she and Auto were in the hospital wing back on Earth.

"\*\*You see what I have uttered?" \*\*Chromsar asked her knowingly; Eve shifting her gaze back up to him. "\*\*I am the one who has brought you here for a great change, Evelyn." \*\*He added.

"What are you talking about?" Eve asked him anxiously.

"\*\*What I define is that this: Where have you smelt, sighted and fought beings such as me before?" \*\*he asked her.

Eve thought for a moment and then answered, with wide eyes and in a voice that was just above a whisper: "The Flood!" she paused, shaking her head a little as if unable to comprehend what she was believing now. "You'reâ€¦|you're theâ€¦|the-"

"\*\*Correct. I am a part of the species of what you and your feeble allies call 'The Flood'. But I am much more than such a simple term, Evelyn." \*\*He began to approach her, worrying Eve and she clenched her fists to defend herself. Chromsar leaned his head in towards her and she caught a whiff of his terrible breath, making her gag with disgust. "\*\*You seeâ€¦|I am a being that has seen and learned, and in some cases revealed much in the way of history, in the way of

story-telling and, particularly, in the way of knowledge." \*\*He began to circle Eve; her eyes following him nervously, as were those of the boys. \*\*"I have seen how crude and simplistic beliefs, desires and decisions can lead to the demise of millions, if not billions of life forms, not just within this galaxy but far beyond this one." \*\*

"A-are you trying to implyâ€|thatâ€|you're fromâ€|outside this galaxy?" Eve asked him, a little confused.

\*\*\*"Exactly!" \*\*he almost cried with delight, his voice going a little high pitched as he spoke that reply; his body turning to face her. \*\*"Rather than lecture you, I shall show you," \*\*he looked back up at the others. \*\*"All of you," \*\*he added.

Almost simultaneously as he stopped speaking, the place changed from a large chamber within in a mountain to a pitch blackness that completely removed the sight of everyone, besides Chromsar of course, within the room for a moment. Then, trillions of tiny white lights began to appear all over the place; lighting up the 'chamber' and enabling the others to see each other once again, though the barrier still remained in place.

"Where are we?" the Arbiter asked.

"We are in the 'Divine Beyond'," Wally answered him, gazing at the many stars around him; his mind remembering when he had brought Eve here to show her how the war between the Forerunners and the Flood began thousands of years ago. "This is where I took Eve," he added, whispering to himself as he looked back at her, his want to try and get to her now overpowering him.

\*\*\*"As you shall remember, Evelyn," \*\*Chromsar was saying. \*\*\*"The war between the Forerunners and my species began when we entered your galaxy from ours," \*\*an image of the Milky Way, about the size of Eve, appeared in front of them and next to it appeared another galaxy which she immediately recognized as the Andromeda galaxy. \*\*\*"We had first originated on a lost world within the Andromeda galaxy and, utilizing the art of biological warfare combined with psychological trauma inflicted by our power to spread, we in a matter of centuries overran the galaxy, squashing all life within it and integrating them into our civilization. No creature could escape us and no race could defeat us." \*\*

\*\*\*"However," \*\* Chromsar continued. \*\*\*"The fighting had destroyed much of my planet's original species to the point of near extinction, leaving a small few such as myself as the sole survivors. Had we not conquered Andromeda we would have succumbed to such faults but after we had almost consolidated our control of this galaxy, we discovered how toâ€|metamorphose ourselves in order to obtain the gift of eternal life and a status equal to that of transcendence. We could conjure up new species from every world that fell to us and accelerate the rate of evolution. In short, the original Flood such as myself became gods!" \*\*

He paused to wipe away a small line of green saliva from his lips before continuing and the images of the galaxy changed to the Forerunner planet that Eve immediately recognized as being the first one she had seen with Wally years ago. Just like last time, three hand-sized comets appeared out of nowhere near her shoulder and fell

towards the planet's surface, disappearing from view.

"\*\*Of course, as with every civilization, there came a time when we had to achieve new living space beyond our galaxy, an aim that your race is all too familiar with within your history," \*\*he looked at Eve momentarily when he said the last part of this sentence. \*\*"But the war had drastically reduced many of our transports from within Andromeda and so we had only enough for one chance to expand. In enormous world ships, we set off into the stars in search of new prey and new territory. After many decades, we finally attained it by locating your 'Milky Way', only to discover, of course, that the Forerunners were already present as the dominant species here, but believed in pacifism and equality and defence for all creatures." \*\*He paused again and shook his head in dismay. \*\*"What absolute nonsense that one could grasp such levels of insanity!" \*\*

Eve overheard him and tried to counter-argue him. "But the Forerunners were trying to uphold the rights to live of all those creatures. They made them feel like they were part of something, like some universal community, or whatever!" she said to him vehemently. "You can't just reject that!"

\*\*"I can and I shall!" \*\*he retorted sternly. \*\*"Evelyn, this view of what you so blindly call a 'universal community' is false! And as for their rights; why should a species ever respect the rights of another when they cannot do the same to their own?! Plus, you must keep in mind that when my kind, or my later progeny as I should correctly state, began to overcome the Forerunners, they had decided to destroy the majority of life in the galaxy. Yes, they did spare many species but they still overruled what you call their 'right' to live regardless!" \*\*he paused to let that sink in before continuing. \*\*"Why should one ever respect rights when they have become senseless to mortality?!"\*\*

"They didn't!" Eve protested. "What you're doing is wrong! You just want to control everything and be just the same as many other rulers that my species has experienced!"

Chromsar chuckled slightly at this. \*\*"You have, to use your simple expression, hit the nail right on the head there, Evelyn. Control is what I want to implement on all life, but it is one that will never break and will never be weak like my ancient foes' had been. And as for this being 'wrong' as you so plainly put it, do not cross morals and emotion with such statements. You will only succumb to what is false by going down such a path!" \*\*his voice began to rise with such vehemence now.\*\* "When you are blinded by such nonsense, you will never know what the real truth is, what \*\*\_\*\*you really are\*\*\_\*\* and \*\*\_\*\*what your true purpose is in this life\*\*\_\*\* rather than sitting around and inhaling such feeble and impertinent knowledge like rights and equality and a loose form of control and such that tries to give you strength when it gives you nothing!" \*\*

Chromsar stopped and inhaled deeply, closing his eyes for a moment as if going into a trance. A startled Eve, along with the boys nearby, watched as the image next to them changed to a view of another planet. All recognized it instantly as Earth.

\*\*"My apologies for straying." \*\*He said and continued. \*\*"When the Forerunners realised that defeat was inevitable, they made the decision to create the Halo Array from the Ark-" \*\*he emphasized his

point by conjuring up a holographic image of the Ark and the seven Halo rings around it next to the Earth. \*\*"As they did so, I came across a planet inhabited by your kind, your home world that you name Earth, at the same time as the Forerunners. Like them, I was amazed at the psychological, biological and physical workings of your species, how they were much like my kind in a way than any other previous species that I had come across had been. When I learned of them being granted the same power as the Forerunners in utilizing their technology, I became obsessed with gaining it as I could not do so with the originals."\*\*

The images changed once again to a view of space, one of the Halo rings just visible in the distance. A bright light suddenly emanated from in the middle of the ring and a bright orb began to swell out from it, devouring everything around it like some kind of all-matter eating monster.

\*\*"The activation of the Halo array, however, was something I had not anticipated in being so sudden due to the internal opposition within the Forerunner species. I watched as many of the Inferior Flood was wiped out in the blink of an eye. With them went almost all of the remainder of my original species, leaving me as the sole survivor, the final member of a now lost people."  
><strong>

He paused and, to the others' amazement, he sniffed and wiped his eye clean from dirty dark brown tears. It shocked them to see this creature, this person even feel great pain despite the language he had just used portraying him as someone who had no love for anything other than his own aims. Eve felt a little bit of sorrow for him; it grabbing hold of her heart and hanging there, but she still reminded herself that despite this show of emotion he was still something dangerous.

Chromsar stopped after a moment and, wiping his eye clean once more, continued. \*\*"I had sent Gravemind into the bowls of the so-called 'Delta Halo' to be the leader of the inferiors imprisoned there until I had regained my strength and found a new way to strike back and achieve total galactic domination." \*\*He stopped and looked back at Eve, the view of space suddenly disappearing and going back the chamber where they had been all along. \*\*"And now with your coming to this planet, Evelyn, and the sudden, yet predictable interference of your kind here, that time for striking back has finally arrived."\*\*

He stepped towards her and Eve, in fear, readied one of her fists but Chromsar's eye lit up dark brown again. Her fist slammed against her chest, her other arm being wrenched against her side again, and she was pulled over towards him, a small but nerve shuddering expression of glee on his face.

"Evelyn!" the Arbiter exclaimed in fear, pounding the barrier with his fists in a vain attempt to break through.

"Don't hurt her!" Auto and Wally cried in unison, but Chromsar, who could hear them, ignored them and looked back down on Eve, his eyes burning with passion, not of love but of power and unstoppable authority.

"\*\*You, Evelyn Knight, shall be the dawning of a new age within this

galaxy," \*\*he breathed at her.

"What the hell do you want me for?!" she demanded.

\*\*"I was looking for someone worthy to assist me in completing my work and the mission of my species. You are that one, and you shall usher in a revolutionary metamorphosis. You shall be the start of a new Transsentient era."\*\*

Eve glared at him with gritted teeth, her blue eyes almost glowing brightly with fiery anger.

"You can go â€" yourself!" she snarled at him. "I'm not helping you at all!"

Chromsar only laughed, only this time it was much louder as if to signify her foolishness in trying to resist him. \*\*"Oh, I think you will find that you have no alternative, Evelyn." \*\*He replied in a voice that sounded almost lustful, moving his arm onto hers and it morphed almost as soon as it touched her covered arm into a small tentacle and began wrapping itself around it. \*\*"You see, I know that locked within that fleshy prison of yours there is a mere fragment of which can surpass all you may use to destroy it and can take shape into a great thing. I know also that you know what lurks within you, lying dormant. But now it is time to awaken it and begin anew." \*\*

His tentacle arm wrapped tighter around her arm, his other arm doing the same to her other arm, pulling her closer to him so she was almost eye level with him. \*\*"Now hold still!"\*\*

"Alright, hold it there!"

The deep voice had made all of them jump and the boys, along with Chromsar, who, through some telekinetic power, held Eve's head in place to prevent her from looking over her shoulder, looked towards the entrance to the chamber to see a group of heavily armoured humans enter, their weapons drawn. At their head was Tysen, who looked on with a startled expression, as did the rest of his squad.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed, flabbergasted at the sight before him. "What's going on?!" he demanded.

\*\*"You shall see!" \*\*Chromsar replied and, with one final look at Eve with his glowing eyes, dropped her onto her hands and knees and stepped away a few paces.

Wally, who his hands placed on the invisible barrier, suddenly watched them fall forward. His heart and mind leapt in realisation! The barrier was down! Without wasting any time, he sprinted towards Eve as fast as he could, kneeling down next to her. Auto, who was standing on his shoulder nearest her crawling positioned form, reached put and touched her. The Arbiter came over as well, standing behind them.

"Eve?" Wally inquired anxiously, all of them waiting to see what would happen.

\*\*XXXXX\*\*



What none of them knew was within Eve's body, floating about in her bloodstream alongside the red blood cells, dark brown/green cells were beginning to take shape. Though they were miniscule in size, their intention was like a giant wave and totally under the control of their master from outside these walls of flesh and blood; it being to take control of the body quickly and send it on a further evolutionary journey.

And that was exactly what it was doing now. Each cell quickly began to multiply by the hundreds. Red blood cells were consumed within milliseconds, as was the blood the cells were floating around in. And very quickly, the propelling of the bloodstream took the deadly cells all around the body like cars on a motorway. Whenever they reached an organ, bone or muscle, they attached themselves to it like parasites and began to infect it with their DNA. The heart, the lungs, the stomach, the bones, liver, kidneys and, finally, the brain; all fell to the unstoppable onslaught of this infection commanded by an alien force from outside this body. The immune system was overwhelmed and infected, the white blood cells failed to respond quickly and the artificial antibodies injected into her body many years ago when she had joined the ER were no match for this new threat.

In a matter of seconds, they had overwhelmed her body and altered her biological structure quicker than anybody could imagine. Deep within her brain, a new master was taking hold. No longer was she in control, but now he was.

**\*\*XXXXXX\*\***

"Eve!" Wally asked again, this time his voice more on edge as he shifted his body a little so he was now in front of her. He placed a hand on her cheek, desperately hoping for a response. "Please, speak to me!" he said.

Suddenly, Eve's hand grabbed him around the throat, making Auto, who was standing on his shoulder, lose his balance and he had to grab a lock of Wally's brown hair in order to stop himself from falling off. Wally gasped and coughed as her grip tightened a little on his neck, not enough to strangle him but to keep him from breaking away easily. Then, she stood up, now holding him several inches above the floor. At first it looked as if she had gained some kind of superhuman strength, but, although this was true, she had, in fact, gained a few more inches to her height and was now holding her friend whom she had come to rescue and take back to Earth at her mercy.

"Evelyn?!" the Arbiter whispered, his voice now full of fear as she held Wally like a ragdoll.

Her head turned to look at him and the ODST squad, her blue eyes now entirely different. Though they had not been covered with skin like Chromsar's eye had, they were no longer a loving, caring, heart-warming and protective blue but were now a dark, aggressive, ambitious and mindless colour of dark green and light brown and answered to only one order from one voice from one body. Chromsar.

Evelyn Knight was now a living, breathing, humanoid Flood creature.

## 21. The awakening

For a moment nobody moved in the chamber. Eve held Wally above the floor as she gazed emotionlessly at the ODS'T squad and the Arbiter standing near the entrance; Chromsar was as still as a statue, silent and observing like a spectator at some kind of sporting game, waiting for the next move to take place; the Arbiter and the ODS'T's stood rooted to the spot by fear and anticipation, not knowing what to do. Eve had changed in seconds, now her ambitions were clouded and nobody, apart from Chromsar that is, knew her next move.

Finally, it was Tysen who broke the silence. "Eve, whatever's wrong with you, you're coming with us!"

He moved forward with the rest of his squad in tow but it was then her eyes turned to him, locking onto him like a lion spotting a perfect antelope out on the savannah. Tysen and the rest of the squad stopped dead in their tracks and they began to back away a little in fear as she just stared at them nonchalantly as if bored with this entire predicament.

\*\*\*"She is no longer your servile, she is mine now! And she shall do as I say!" \*\*Chromsar said darkly. \*\*\*"Kill them!" \*\*he spat.

Almost at once, Eve reacted by throwing Wally into the Arbiter, the Elite crying out as the Forerunner enhanced human ploughed into him and sent them both to the floor. Tysen and the ODS'T's were taken by surprise and were so stunned that by the time they had regained their composure they found themselves staring at Eve, who had moved over to them so quickly in a few strides, she having grown to almost seven feet five as a result of Chromsar's mutation of her body. Tysen stood rooted to the spot out of fear whilst the others quite literally leapt back in order to get away from her.

"Shoot her!" Tysen cried out in a panicked voice as she knocked his weapon out of his hands.

One of the ODS'T's fired a burst of ammo at her from his battle rifle, the bullets slamming into her side and chest. Eve, however, just stared down at the points of impact as her bodysuit lit up like a lighthouse and then looked up at him with a glare in her dark eyes. They had not hurt her one bit! She was immune to bullets!

"What the hell do we do?!" the blonde haired ODS'T exclaimed fearfully.

Tysen took a step back but Eve, whose head snapped back to look at him, grabbed him on the arms and held him above the floor almost effortlessly; his face contorted into a look of terror as if she was attempting to scare him to death.

"Let me go, Eve!" he breathed, his voice struggling to stay calm being this close to a now dangerous foe.

"Eve!" Auto, who was standing on Wally's shoulder (he having gotten up from the floor) cried out desperately. "Stop, please!"

She just looked at them and then back at Tysen and, with a slight lifting of her glare to a look that resembled disappointment, leaned in close and recited, whispering: "Mark \_my\_ words, when we get back

to Earth you will be sorry!" to him.

Tysen, momentarily, gave her a confused look but it was instantly replaced when he saw something long trail over her shoulder, twisting and coiling as if moved closer to him. It was a tentacle! And it was heading straight for hisâ€¦

"NO!" he almost screamed, struggling as best he could but Eve just held him in place with virtually no effort as the tentacle suddenly wrapped itself around his mouth in an instant, silencing his cries and screams. \_"Let me go! Please!" \_came the muffled cries from under the tentacle as the end of it stopped, pointed towards his mouth and, with part of the bulk moving aside, lunged into his throat.

Wally, the Arbiter, Auto and the remaining ODST's were so shocked that they had to look away, some of the ODST's even covering their ears, as Tysen was brutally killed near them. He cried out and shook violently but Eve did not even blink as the tentacle she had forced into him began to work its way around and quickly began crushing whatever it touched. Gurgling and choking sounds filled the air and Chromsar, who was watching all this from the position he had been in for the last few minutes, just humphed as he, having control of Eve's body enabled him to look into her memories, went over what he was seeing within her head. It pleased him greatly; quickly solving the problems that he knew would have faced them on their mission.

\_Finally we can our thirst for domination in this galaxy \_he thought with a sense of eagerness.

A thud nearby snapped him out of looking into Eve's head. There on the ground in front of her was the body of Tysen, blood now staining the skin around his mouth as the tentacle hung from her back; it too covered with blood at its end. The others now looked over at the lifeless corpse with flabbergasted expressions. Never before had they thought Eve could do something like that to even anyone or anything, let alone another human. It made them feel sick but also frightened them for they now knew the power she wielded.

"Quick, let's get outta here!" the blonde haired ODST cried out all of a sudden, throwing his weapon to the floor and, turning round, running as fast as he could out of the chamber; the other ODST's following close behind, leaving the Arbiter, Wally and Auto alone with her and Chromsar.

Eve looked at them blankly, as if trying to show a sort of lifelessness within her to them. She took a step towards them and they took a step back; the Arbiter's eyes glancing at the entrance to the chamber whilst trailing his hand over the plasma rifle he had though he mentally doubted it would be of any use now.

"Oracle, we must go, now!" he hissed to Wally and Auto, both of whom looked back at him with shocked expressions akin to when they had witnessed Eve kill Tysen. "Do not argue, there is nothing we can do for Evelyn!" he snapped at them, grabbing Wally on the non-occupied shoulder and pulling him back towards the chamber entrance.

"We can't leave her behind!" Auto protested breathlessly.

"No, we have to do something!" Wally agreed, his voice filling with

anguish.

"\*\*Do not bother to waste your breath and time," \*\*Chromsar told them, having overheard them easily. "\*\*It will be futile. But I will be merciful, as you brought her here to me! \*\*\_\*\*Leave now\*\*\_\*\*!" \*\*he growled the last two words at them, his eye going into a glare almost immediately as he spoke.

The Arbiter, seizing the chance, grabbed Wally around the waist and pulled him away. Wally struggled as best he could but it was useless and his brown eyes filled with sorrow as he watched Eve get further and further away as if he was a lover losing the love and cherish of his partner with every passing second. Eve, on the other hand, just stared at them with that blank look etched onto her face; emotionless; un-moving; almost dead in life.

"No, Arbiter, we cannot leave her!" Wally protested but the Arbiter shushed him and told him that there was nothing more they could do for her and Wally, upon reaching the chamber entrance, finally conceded and, the Arbiter letting go of him, left with the Elite. He stopped one last time and both he and Auto looked back at Eve as if not wanting to let her out of their sights before they continued on after the Arbiter.

As the two left her peripheral vision, Eve shook her head a little, her eyes having a hint of blue work their way back into them. With a moan, she rubbed her forehead with the back of her hand and tried to speak but nothing came out.

\*\*"Evelyn!" \*\*Chromsar barked angrily, striding over to her side in an instant. "\*\*Do not ever try that again!" \*\*he snapped at her.

She did not reply but instead looked down at the floor as if she were a dog bowing its head knowing that it had done a bad thing that displeased the owner. Chromsar held out his hand and lifted her chin with it so their brown/dark green eyes met. "\*\*Do not think that you are a servile to me, Evelyn. I shall give you back yourself as anew and augmented." \*\*

As he spoke to her, his eyes lit up a little and he moved his hand towards her, curling it into a fist and twisting it left and right. As he did this, Eve winced in pain, though she did not let out any sound, making her look as if she were advertising for an old silent film, as she felt like her head was breaking apart.

\*\*"You just need, as your kind states, 'a little tweaking here and there' and you shall be yourself once more," \*\*he told her and looked towards the top of the dome, breathing in heavily and then declaring loudly. "\*\*Arise! The time has come!"\*\*

His voice reverberated around the chamber and from somewhere in the almost pitch black darkness above them, someone, or something, and there were several of them, began to move. Chromsar smiled.

"\*\*The coming of our species is nigh! This is the beginning of a strong and precious age! Let it begin now with our awakening!"

><strong>

## 22. Little hope

**\*\*Meanwhile, outside the mountain entrance\*\***

"Keep them under guard. We do not want any of them escape our grasp!"

Vadumee and the Elites that remained, numbering about forty, stood guard over the few remaining Brutes and Grunts, mostly the latter, that had given up and now had their prisoners sitting on the ground outside the entrance to the mountain on the wasteland between it and the jungle. Many of the Sangheili had their weapons close, the want to kill them lingering in their eyes and the feeling of it struggling to stay put in their hands. Vadumee, who stood near the entrance, felt the same way but he knew that, to his displeasure, any opportunity at taking prisoners was not to be missed for they might have some valuable intelligence that would be worthy to the cause of Sanghelios.

\_Still, it is unfair! \_He thought angrily. \_Why should we spare them, after they have killed many of our comrades?!\_

And indeed many of the Sangheili had died today. After the Elites had retreated back into the jungle in order to lure the Brutes and their 'allies' into the undergrowth and away from the mountain, they had split up and then encircled them, quickly cutting the defenders to pieces. The defenders that had survived, however, had quickly broken out of the ring of Elites and attacker Grunts and had slaughtered many of them as they fought their way back with a renewed ferocity towards the mountain. There were several more Elites in the jungle searching for any survivors with the Elite allied Grunts that had survived but it was almost certain there would be none, or very few at the most.

Now, however, with the battle virtually over, Vadumee and the other Elites were waiting with a growing impatience at the return of the Arbiter, the Oracle, Evelyn and her construct. Several times, he had mentally fought with himself over whether he should lead a team inside to check on the situation but the Arbiter had given him orders not to intervene on what happened inside, though without the \_no matter what\_ that people usually expected when receiving these kinds of orders. Even now, he stopped and glanced at the hole that led into the mountain with a look of conflict raging in his eyes, again wondering if he should disobey the orders given to him and go inside the mountain, but again he reminded himself that he was ordered, and even \_needed \_to stay out here which in turn annoyed him even more.

"How long should we remain, leader?" a nearby minor Elite asked and Vadumee looked at him questionably. "Out here, I mean. Should we enter the mountain after the Arbiter and Evelyn?"

Vadumee paused for a moment before replying. "We shall wait a few more minutes and then we shall venture inside." he replied.

"Look!" a major Elite near the mountain entrance suddenly exclaimed, pointing into the entrance.

All heads outside turned to look at the mountain entrance and almost immediately, as if on cue, the blonde haired ODST charged out as fast

as his legs would carry him, a look of terror on his face. He had outrun the others in his squad and was thinking of only one thing: \_GET OUT OF HERE NOW!\_

"Wait up, Sam!" came out of the mountain as the rest of the ODS'T's ran out after him, all of the humans ignoring the Elites and their prisoners as they ran past and through the force outside the mountain heading straight for the trees. Vadumee shouted after them, ordering them to stop but they just ignored him, and fought their way out of any of the grasps of the Elites that tried to grab them.

"What is wrong with them?! Why do they look so terrified?" Vadumee asked himself.

"Vadumee!"

The silver armoured Elite turned, along with everyone else, to see the Arbiter emerge from the mountain with Wally following close behind, both of them looking terrified. This now alarmed the Elites; the Arbiter terrified! Sure they had seen him scared, but terrified was something that was a rarity in him.

"Arbiter!" Vadumee exclaimed from his position about twenty feet away. "What is it? Where is Evelyn?"

"We must leave, now!" the Arbiter shouted to him. "Hurry, make haste!" he shouted to the other Elites, who now all began to look at one another with concerned gazes, as did the Brutes and the other defenders.

"What is with your precious Arbiter?" a nearby Brute major commented loudly. "Has he finally lost his senses?!" he added mockingly.

"Be silent!" a minor Elite snarled at him. "Keep your tongue silent or I sha-"

The Elite was cut off by a thunderous screech that seemed to resonate throughout the entire planet, drowning out the sounds of all other life forms as if it were the calling of some major event or creature. Well, the latter would be closer to the source of the noise, only it was to be the noise of \_creatures\_, not \_creature\_. Now fear began to grip all who were outside the mountain; the Brutes largely began getting to their feet; Grunts began to whimper and the Elites began to back away. They had all heard that screech before and knew perfectly well that when it was heard, it was \_never good news\_.

"Hurry, we must go now!" the Arbiter shouted fearfully, grabbing Wally by the arm and pulling him away from the mountain entrance, pushing back a few other Elites in the hopes that they would follow his advice and flee.

"Arbiter!" the major Elite near the mountain entrance exclaimed. "What is it that is the source of that screech?!"

\_\*\*ROOOOOAAAAARRRRRRRR! \*\*\_Literally on cue, a huge tentacle lunged out of the mountain entrance like a trap door spider, grabbed the major Elite and threw him into the side of the rock, crushing his skull on impact and killing him instantly. Then, a large bulky form

began to lumber out of the mountain and stopped in the sunlight as if blinded by it, turning its body left and right as if observing those in front of it, who were all startled by its gruesome appearance.

The creature was tall, about nine feet tall, with a bulking figure that almost put the Hulk to shame. The skin was a dark brown colour, it had two huge bulky arms, two legs and where the head was meant to be was just a small hole with red tentacles sticking out of it. Protruding from the back of the creature were several longer tentacles that were huge in size and must have been about ten feet long each, one of these being the one that had killed the major Elite.

For a moment, no one moved as if the scene was frozen in time like it was to capture the arrival of a new species or highlight the moment at the dawn of a new age. Then, out of the mountain came two of the creatures, stopping either side of the first that had emerged into the daylight. Movement from the top of the entrance revealed several more of the creatures as they crawled up the sides of the mountain, quickly spreading out like a swarm of ants overtaking something they had found on the ground.

"By the rings!" one of the Brutes exclaimed in shock, leaping to his feet. "What are these monstrosities!"

"They are the Parasite!" the Arbiter shouted back, pulling Wally with him as the crowd of Brutes, Grunts and Elites began to separate, many of them now wishing they had followed the example of the ODST's.

\*\*\*"And now you shall witness the full power they possess!" \*\*a deep voice, that seemed to fill the air around the mountain, akin to when people hear the voice of God, said. The Arbiter, Wally and Auto knew who that voiced belonged to but everyone else was frantically looking in all directions to try and determine its source, unaware that Chromsar's voice was coming from inside the mountain.

\*\*\*"My fellow servile creatures, slaughter them all!" \*\*Chromsar declared and at once all hell broke loose.

One of the creatures that had crawled onto the side of the mountain leapt from it and, with an earth shuddering boom, landed in the middle of the force of prisoners and at once began swinging its arms and tentacles in all directions, sending Brutes, Grunts, Jackals and even a few Elites that happened to be nearby in all directions, causing all the rest to break into a panic and flee in all directions.

At the same time, the other creatures that had climbed onto the sides of the mountain jumped into the swarm and began attacking everything in sight whilst those in front of the entrance charged in unison into the force, smashing through all that stood in their way like water breaking through a clay mixture. Bodies fell from being thrown aside all around the creatures; others were crushed underfoot by their enormous feet and arms, which they used to propel themselves forward quicker towards new targets. Screams and roars of pain and panic echoed into the air.

The Arbiter pulled Wally away from the carnage and towards the trees

as bodies fell all around them.

"Hurry, Oracle!" he urged, the fear evident in his voice as a minor Grunt fell down beside them.

"Arbiter, we cannot leave Eve!" Wally argued, pulling his arm out of his grip just as they reached the treeline but the Elite shook his head.

"No, we cannot. She has become something else, Oracle!" He replied, looking back up at the carnage.

An Elite was knocked to the ground and then stomped on by creature that had knocked it down. The sounds of blast fire filled the air, but they were useless against the impenetrable bulk of these creatures that continued to wreak havoc. The few surviving Elites, Brutes Grunts, and whatever else that had been outside, that had been lucky to survive were now scattering into the trees, hoping to put as much distance between themselves and this area.

"Arbiter!" a voice called out to them over all of the noise. The three looked up to see Vadumee run up to them, the look of fear lingering in his eyes. Dirt and the blood of the species here covered his armour. "We must leave now!" he told them, moving into the trees, hoping they would follow.

The Arbiter did, but stopped when he saw that Wally was rooted to the spot, looking back at the scene of death just several tens of metres in front of him. His eyes held the want to go and find Eve and try and snap her out of thisâ€¦|thisâ€¦|control or trance or whatever word that could be used to describe what was holding her in the state she was in now. He could not just abandon her here! Doing that would be breaking his promise to protect her and get her out of here safely. There just had to be something he could do!

"Wally!" Auto, who was standing on his shoulder watching the scene as well, said to him. Wally looked down at him and saw the same feelings in his eyes as were in his own. Both wanted to go out and help Eve but with these creatures and thatâ€¦|thing controlling her that seemed to be a distant, and probably even a lost thought. "We have to go, c'mon!"

"Auto, we cannot leave her!"

"I know, I don't want to either!" he replied. A high pitched scream momentarily drew their attention to see another Grunt, a major, be thrown into a nearby tree trunk. "But we have to! We'll get Eve back!"

Wally looked back up at the scene of carnage with a sad look on his face. Every inch of his body wants to go back and grab Eve, but the insistence of Auto and the Arbiter's sudden call to him from behind made him realise the precariousness of the situation. Eve really was lost, and so would they if they remained.

With a heavy sigh, Wally turned and joined the Arbiter and Vadumee as they fled into the trees, the last remnants of gunfire, screaming and roaring echoing in their ears.

Meanwhile, near the entrance to the mountain, Eve walked out into the



daylight and gazed at the scenery with her new eyes, taking it in blankly as if it all meant nothing to her, as if life itself meant nothing. She took another step out into the outside world, now taking in the many dead bodies of the Elites, Grunts and who knows what else was here when the Flood creatures attacked.

"Hughâ€|h-help!" a voice nearby croaked weakly.

Eve looked to her left and saw a minor Elite lying on the ground, its armour shattered and its legs covered in blood. The mandibles that were its mouth opened and closed with every short breath he took. She walked over to him and knelt down beside the dying Elite, looking him straight in the eye.

"D-D-De-Demon!" he croaked and lifted up his hand towards her face. "P-pl-please! Do not let go of me!"

Eve just sighed and, in one quick motion, struck her hand across his face, only her fingers had become claw-like when she did this but they returned to their normal human self when she moved her arm away from the Elite, who was now dead, having died instantly when her claws hit him. She then just stood up and walked away as if she had already forgotten about him.

Chromsar, who now exited himself from the mountain's interior and watched what Eve had done, just nodded but showed no emotion on his face.

"\*\*Excellent work, Evelyn Knight," \*\*he said, knowing his voice could reach her. "\*\*You have already shown me your worth and now with this message we have sent the galaxy will soon fear our return." \*\*He paused and looked in the direction that Wally, Auto, the Arbiter and Vadumee fled into. "\*\*As for your friends, they are now your enemies because they are mine. But fear not, for we shall wipe clean the slate of degradation they have brought onto you in the covering of false hope. Even now they abandon you to your fate, but I will help you reclaim yourself, and we shall kill \*\*\_\*\*them\*\*\_\*\* in the process!"\*\*

## 23. Back to Earth

\*\*Several hours later\*\*

Luck. That seemed to be the only thing that had saved the survivors of the mountain battle. As the last few phantoms descended for a landing not far from the nearby village, the enormous shape of the previously UNSC, now FACTIO 1, \_Retribution \_frigate hovering nearby, the thoughts of the events that had transpired hours ago still lingered in their minds as if they had occurred just moments ago. Then again, that was what it was like when you had escaped certain death several times; you would constantly play the feeling over and over again in your mind, re-experiencing it continuously.

The last phantom came to a halt about ten feet above the ground, its side opening up to allow the occupants to step down onto the ground. Wally (who still had Auto on his shoulder), the Arbiter, Vadumee and four other Elites all stepped down onto the ground; different in height, colour of armour and species but all the same in how they were feeling following what they had experienced that attack by the

Flood at the mountain. Now only questions were being raised among them; what were they to do now that this new threat had been unleashed? What would be the fate of their planet and their families? How would they stop it? All of these questions reigned but no one had the answers to them.

Wally in particular was constantly thinking of Eve; his insides screaming at him for leaving her behind. How could they have done so! She was their friend for crying out loud and they just left her in the hands of thatâ€|thatâ€|thing, Chromsar. How could they?! She had saved them countless times in the past and they had just left her. Guilt ran through him like water through a pipe and every inch of him was raring to go back out there and get her back.

"Arbiter, Oracle!" a nearby voice barked in their direction and, looking up with Auto and Vadumee, they all saw it was an Elite zealot running towards them. "What happened? Why are you back with so few numbers?"

Vadumee shook his head and looked up at the zealot with shock filled eyes, unable to bring himself to explain what had just occurred.

"Well?" the zealot pressed on, the demand in his voice growing.

"We were attacked by the parasite," Vadumee told him and, as he and the other three expected, the zealot's eyes went wide and his body went still. "We must evacuate the area immediately. There is no doubt that the parasite will hope to spread and take over this place."

The zealot did not reply straight away. In fact, Vadumee had to clear this throat loudly to get a response from him and the zealot, after nodding, turned and rushed off to order the clearing of the nearby settlements.

"What about the Brutes and their allies?" Wally asked, just remembering that there had been others there at the mountain.

"There is no doubt they will leave when word gets around," Auto replied and sighed, looking up at Vadumee and the Arbiter. "You guys get rid of one enemy and now you have another that's even worse,"

The Arbiter growled. "There must be something we can do to hinder their progress!" he said through gritted teeth. "We cannot simply let them run wild or they will slaughter everything they come across!"

"What do you mean we go?! What the hell is going on here?!" a nearby voice demanded angrily, drawing the attention of the four.

Nearby, about twenty feet away through all the ruckus and the activity going on around them, they saw the blonde haired ODST soldier, with the rest of what had been Tysen's squad, standing behind him, arguing with another zealot Elite who, after hearing the humans' statement they were going to leave, had denied them from doing so, stating that they needed to be here to help in dealing with their old and common foe. After all, they were 'allies' as the zealot told them.

"Look, buddy, let's get one thing straight! We \_are not allies anymore\_! We were but that was a long time ago. Right now, this is different and \_your problem!\_" he emphasized the last two words by pointing at the zealot. "Let us go back to Earth!"

"You are being inconsiderate of the fact that your planet's hero is lost and you are going to abandon her to the parasite!" the Elite snapped back.

"Hey, I never said that. I'm just trying to point out that right now it is impossible for us to deal with getting her back, especially when you have thoseâ€|'things' there with her!"

"I do not believe you! I have heard what your world had descended to now and it would not surprise me if you were to leave her to rot with the parasite as soon as you go!"

As the argument raged, the four looked at each other and Auto spoke up. "We must go back to Earth,"

"What?!" the other three exclaimed in shock, looking at the holographic human in surprise. Back to Earth! How could he suggest such a thing! "No, listen, we really have to go back and get help from Hood and/or anyone else. It's the only way we can really help Eve!"

"Human A.I what is with your mind?!" Vadumee growled. "We cannot leave. Me and the Arbiter cannot leave, we have to stay here and defend the planet from the parasite."

"I know, you guys don't have to come if you have important duties here," Auto told them and looked at Wally. "Wally, \_we\_ have to go back and try and convince Hood or the politicians or whoever to assist us in our mission!"

"Why do you need the Oracle?" Vadumee asked.

"Extra source of information and proof," Wally replied. "I and Auto are the only ones who really know Eve enough and with both of us there that should sway their opinions to aiding us."

"You cannot go alone," the Arbiter said to them, making sure that he kept his voice firm. "I must come with you."

"Arbiter, it's okay, you don't need to do this."

"Yes I do!" he snapped back vehemently. "She is my comrade as much as yours, and I will not leave her to the parasite!" he paused for a moment to let that sink in before continuing. "Besides, having me there will be sure to reinforce your point."

"I shall come as well," Vadumee piped up in a voice that, like the Arbiter's, told them that he was not taking no for an answer.

Auto sighed. "Alright, fine. Let's go and grab those soldiers and head back to Earth, quickly. We got an enemy to stop,"

"Let us hope we shall stop them in time and get Eve back," Wally added as they ran over to the group.

After a few tense moments discussion, arguing and persuading, the ODS'T's agreed to take the others with them, not that they really cared anyway, and the Elites agreed to let them go; Vadumee and the Arbiter leaving control of the forces on the planet in the hands of the zealot elders throughout the many settlements.

However, as they left on the enormous ship, the \_JFK\_, and began to head back out into space, the crew of the ship were unaware of a light purple/cyan blue light quickly appear inside the cargo bay and then disappear again in the blink of an eye.

It was obvious now that someone, or \_something\_, was stowing away on the ship.

## 24. UNSC base

**\*\*One hour later\*\***

**\*\*Location: Underground base, outskirts of New Mombasa II\*\***

Going through the corridors of the underground base where Eve had escaped from days earlier was not a good thing for Auto and even more so for Vadumee, the Arbiter and Wally as they were eyed intensely by the workers and soldiers there and could often hear the whispering of their voices behind them; these obviously not being very approving or mildly suspicious at the least. At least they had some help with them and that was in the form of the ODS'T squad.

After making a jump from Sanghelios to Earth, the UNSC \_JFK\_ had literally shot towards New Mombasa II's main UNSC base, all of the crew members hoping to immediately report back on what had just occurred. At the last moment, however, they had been ordered away to the UNSC base outside New Mombasa, something Auto was not very happy about in particular and wellâ€|this was it. Now they were being taken to the office of Richard and Michael, who were on their way after some council meeting in the city had been interrupted.

There was one thing, however, that was concerning the group and that was of course Eve. How were they going to explain to them that she had been captured and turned into one of the Flood? How were they going to explain that they had lost her and now she was far away in another part of the galaxy on an extra-terrestrial home world wreaking havoc? They just could not find a proper and easy way to break it down to them, and with every second that passed the prospect of them doing so seemed further from their minds.

"Alright, we're nearly there," the blonde haired ODS'T said to them, snapping them out of their thinking, as they turned down another corridor; passing a worker who gave them a shocked look as if they were some kind of apparition that has appeared out of nowhere.

They came to a halt outside of an office door that was wide open and from within the room shouting reached their ears. An argument between two people was raging.

"The council are gonna have our necks for this!" one voice said.

"Will you stop it! It's bad enough that we a bunch of aliens comin'

this way, last thing I need is you going on about them dismissing us or whatever!" the other snapped back.

"Listen Michael, we were just about to finally have gotten rid of Hood and gain the glory of bringing peace," another replied and a sigh followed from the same voice. "We could have gained publicity here and globally with that!"

"Oh shut the hell up will you!" the first voice snapped back vociferously. "I can't deal with you moaning!"

"Sir!" The blonde haired ODS'T stopped in the doorway and saluted the two politicians in front of him. Michael and Richard. "We are here to report back on something very urgent!" he added with a tone that clearly expressed his concerns.

Richard looked at Michael with an annoyed expression and sighed. "Alright, get in here," he said, moving his hand towards him as if trying to move the soldier telepathically.

The other ODS'T's entered the room, but when Wally, Auto, the Arbiter and Vadumee appeared in the doorway, Michael shot up from his seat as if it had suddenly caught fire. "What the?! What the Hell are they doing here!" he shouted, pointing a finger at them as Vadumee shut the door behind him.

"They'reâ€¦they're part of the reason we're here," the blonde haired ODS'T replied nervously, drawing a confused look from Richard and a speechless, but enraged one from Michael.

"Sorry, what?" Richard asked. "What do you mean? What have they done?" he demanded.

"We have committed nothing," the Arbiter replied to him, silencing the politician. "We have come here to ask for your help,"

Michael snorted. "I don't think so, split lip," he replied, walking over to the front of his desk and pointing a finger at the Elite. "Let's get one thing straight. \_We are not allies anymore! \_You've got your war to deal with; we have our ownâ€¦\_problems\_ to take care of. We don't need and don't want to get involved with you, understand?"

The Arbiter narrowed his eyes at Michael and went to reply when Richard spoke up first. "Speaking of you Elites; where's Eve?" he asked and saw almost at once that everyone in the room began to eye each other nervously. "What? What's wrong?!" he demanded vociferously upon seeing the exchange of nervous glances.

"She's been taken," Vadumee answered him after a few tense moments of silence. "Taken by the Flood,"

Richard and Michael just stared at him with confused looks; the words 'the Flood' meaning nothing to them. Then again, having not been in Voi at the time of their arrival on earth they would not have had anyway.

"What are you talking about?" Michael asked.

"What I am talking about is the Parasite, a race that devours

whatever other life forms it comes across!" Vadumee snapped. "Ask them!" he pointed at the ODS'T's. "They will agree with what I have to say!"

Richard and Michael looked over towards the blonde haired ODS'T and the rest of his squad standing behind him with expressions on their face that said 'Well, tell us then if this is true'.

"He's right, sir," the blonde haired ODS'T said, nodding his head. "She was taken by thisâ€|thisâ€|thing! And turned into some kind of mutant and killed Tysen. We only just got out of there and she and these other bigâ€|things chased after us and then started killing all the Elites and Brutes outside the mountain we were at. It was horrible!"

Richard just stared at them again for a moment, the expression on his face clearly showing that he just could not believe what he was hearing, literally. Sighing heavily, he shook his head in annoyance.

"Have you all been sniffing something or been hit on the head?!" he asked sarcastically. "What is wrong with you! I meanâ€|how can Eve have been turned into one of theseâ€|mutant things or whatever?! How is it even possible?"

"With all due respect, sir," Auto piped up. "With what happened during the war, it's not something new, at leastâ€|\_not completely\_,"

"Auto, I think you need to be checked to make sure you're not going faulty," he said to him.

"He is not!" Wally piped up, his voice desperate. "Look, please. You must help us in getting Eve back. We have to do something! Please, help us!" he pleaded.

"Look, who is this?!" Michael demanded as his and Richard's eyes not turned on Wally with anger blazing like an inferno within them. "Is this thatâ€|weirdâ€|monitor freak Eve went on about?! What is he doing here anyway?"

"She's the reason she left in the first place; to come and rescue me," Wally replied, though he began to have some regrets as the two politicians glanced at each other and then Michael screwed up his face into a sort of scowl.

"Oh I see, so it's your fault she's gone then?!" he spat rhetorically. "You come to repent then, light bulb?!" he added sarcastically.

By this point, the Arbiter had had enough. "You do not understand the severity of the situation!" he shouted at the two, startling them. "Evelyn is in danger and you are standing her berating us. We need to get her back and do something about the Flood before they spread too far for us to contain and put the entire ga-"

Suddenly, the lights in the room shut off as if someone had flipped the switch; but no one had. For a moment, the stunned people in the room stared at each other warily as if hoping those around them had an answer for this sudden occurrence. Finally, Auto broke the silence

with a grunt as he slammed a hand on his forehead.

"Oh no!" he grunted. "I'm getting some unknown contact here in the base!" he said, causing the others to look at him worryingly. For a moment he stared ahead with a pained expression on his avatar face, but then it quickly changed to one of shock and complete disbelief. "Oh no!" he gasped with a shake of his head. "It can't be!"

"What is it?!" Richard asked Auto anxiously.

"It's Eve," he whispered, his voice only just comprehensible to those in the room. "She's here!"

The ODSF squad and the two Elites looked at each other with shocked and fearful expressions. She was here?! How? How could she have gotten here, there was no way she could have stowed away on the ship without them knowing! That did not matter now though; her presence here on Earth was disconcerting to say the very least.

"Well, where is she?" Michael demanded Auto. "Contact her and get her to come here right now!"

"I can't!" Auto snapped back vehemently. "Don't you see, she's one of the Flood and-"

All of a sudden, a loud beeping sound emitted from the desk behind Michael, stopping the conversation mid-sentence. Michael rushed over behind it and pressed a small button under it and a holographic screen appeared from the front of the desk, hovering above it. For a moment nothing was there, but then it filled with an image of a corridor that was largely dark from the loss of power. The screen flickered, the red words \*\*CCTV: corridor 032\*\* hovering in the bottom right corner.

"You see anything?" Richard asked.

"Hang on," Michael replied; holding up his finger as he continued to stare at the screen, watching it to see if anything happened. Something had to be if he was receiving this transmission from a security CCTV camera. "C'mon, what is it you wanna show me for cryin' out loud!" he muttered tensely under his breath. "I bet its malf-AAHH!"

Suddenly, Michael leapt back from the screen, as did everyone else watching, each of their faces as white as sheets and their hearts beating like drums in their chests, when they all saw what was on there.

A pair of dark green/dark brown eyes had suddenly shot up from below and looked into the screen with no expression within them, no soul, no emotion, as if they were entirely devoid of life and doomed to wander like some trapped soul of the Earth. The pupils had shrunk to almost nothing, yet she could see right into the camera. For a moment, they all stared at her and she stared back, then a fuzzy static picture appeared on screen and the words in red \*\*signal lost \*\*appeared in front of them.

Silence reigned for a moment before the blonde haired ODSF began to panic. "Oh God, she really is here!" he cried, his breathing becoming erratic. "What do we do now!"

"Compose yourself!" Vadumee barked at him, pulling out his plasma rifle. "I shall go ahead and find her. The rest of you shall stay here!"

"No, Vadumee, that wouldn't be a good idea!" Auto protested.

"The construct is right, brother," the Arbiter added. "You know how deadly she is now. You will not stand a chance,"

"My aim is not to kill, only to try and make her see the light," Vadumee replied firmly. "That is my final word," he said to the others, looking at all of them as if to prove his point. "I will go and deal with her. Stay here and be ready in case I do not return," and with that he walked out of the room and shut the door behind him, heading right into the abyss of uncertainty.

## 25. Death of a comrade

**\*\*Several minutes later\*\***

Traversing the dimly lit corridors of the UNSC base was something Vadumee did not really want to do, or expected himself to be doing at all but here he was doing exactly that! One thing that had quickly gotten to him was that there was nothing but silence, a still deathly silence that seemed to add some sort of eerie feeling to this task of his as if he were in some kind of horror film and was coming up to the scene where the murder or monster or demon or whatever vulgar, horrific creature there was placed here was about to attack. The only noises he could hear were his own footsteps on the metallic floor echoing down the corridor, his own shallow breathing and the very faint sounds of shouting from the human workers and soldiers within the base.

As Vadumee looked over his shoulder, he began to suddenly feel uncomfortable; well—more so than he had done before. After all, he was virtually alone here in this corridor and with a controlled, hostile entity within the base there was no excuse for him not to be uncomfortable. After seeing what she was capable of back on Sanghelios, and having also stowed away on their ship and made it back to Earth without them even noticing, Eve could be anywhere and that was a very dangerous thing considering her state right now.

Stepping out from the left turning at the end of a three way corridor, weapon raised and eyes scanning every inch of the space around him, Vadumee silently crept on with his task. Entering this new corridor, though, was like going from a familiar world into one of pure uncertainty and bewilderment; something that Vadumee, hell anyone would be anxious about. Sweat began to run down his head underneath his armour and his shoulders tensed a little as if he had had a cold chill pass right through him. Despite this, he pressed on.

As he walked down the corridor, turning his body with his weapon every few steps like some sort of robot, his finger on the trigger, the feeling of being uncomfortable subsided a little. Maybe this corridor was not so bad; maybe it was safe. If anything would have been down here it would have attacked him by now.



\_All this waiting, though, is not doing anything to ease my pounding nerves! \_He thought to himself sombrely.

THUD! Vadumee's eyes darted to the end of the corridor ahead of him and he fired a blast in reaction, having heard the noise come from that general direction. There was no one there though but this did nothing to ease his already terrified nerves. What was it that made that noise? And if it was here still, where was it?!

Then he remembered again; his sudden bout of fear having caused him to momentarily forget why he was here in the first place. What if it was?

"Oh no!" he muttered under his breath in fear, now urging himself to get to a safer part of this base quickly before she found him and cornered him, though a part of his mind began to doubt whether it was too late already.

He took a step towards the end of the corridor, breathing heavily and keeping his finger on the trigger of his weapon. His heart raced within the confines of his chest as if he was running in a marathon and had puffed himself out. Adrenaline surged through his veins like some life-giving force but seemed to only aggravate him more.

TAP! Another noise echoed down the corridor and, quick as a flash, Vadumee fired another blast; this time back down the way he had come, anxiety sweeping over him like a sea wave. There was something here with him and his mind was going immediately to what, or who it could be.

"Reveal yourself!" he shouted down the corridor, his voice quivering with apprehension, though nothing happened after a few moments of waiting so he began to creep down the corridor towards the end.

When he was a few feet from the end, he took a deep breath and pushed half-down on the trigger of his weapon, ready to fire on whatever was there. More sweat fell from his head. Anxiety began to eat away at him like termites on a pile of wood; every second every fibre of his strength was sapped and replaced with fear and as he approached, it intensified to exploding point.

Stopping at the corner and breathing another deep breath, he stepped forward and turned the corner, ready for what was there.

Nothing! His eyes could not believe it, there was...nothing down the corridor. It was just dimly lit and empty like the last ones he had been down. How could it be so, he heard a noise and could have sworn he'd seen something. If he did, though, then where was it?

"AAAH!!!"

Suddenly, something grabbed him and pulled him up to the ceiling, holding Vadumee by the neck with a long tentacle that wrapped itself around his neck and upper chest and began to crush down with terrifying force like an anaconda crushing its prey before devouring it. With the tentacle rising over his face, Vadumee looked up as he struggled desperately at his attacker and saw at once that his worst fears had been realised.

"N-No!" he gasped. "St-â€|St-op! Pâ€|pleâ€| E-" he gasped with a fading voice. "St-stop! Ev-"

Finally, he took one last breath and, with a sudden tightening of the tentacle around the neck, his head cocked to one side and fell to the floor as the tentacle released him, now a body drained of all life and to be left to either rot or be taken away. Either way, the former would still happen.

Jumping down onto the floor next to him with a loud thud was Eve; her bodysuit now torn slightly as if she had tried to rip it off, her hair was a mess and looked as if she had washed it and then not dried it. What was most striking about her though was that she wasâ€|well, emotionless. Her eyes held none and her face showed none as well. It was as if she was a zombie, devoid of all thought, of all emotion, of life itself and left to wander like some trapped soul.

It was obvious that now she was a true living, breathing Flood/human hybrid.

Looking down at the body of the silver armoured Elite, she let out a small noise from within the confines of her throat, though it did not get past her closed mouth. Anyone standing hear her would have recognized it to be a laugh.

Walking on, she left the body alone; her sights and mind set on one target, or I should say one \_group \_of targets. Things were going to get hairy from this point on.

## 26. The one we once knew

Seconds ticked by quickly, but to those in the office they felt like hours as they eyed the door nervously, waiting to see what would happen next. Michael and Richard eyed each other nervously, one hand each on the desk; Michael's other hand gripping a pistol he had gotten from his desk and Richard's hanging by his side and shaking madly as if it had come to life and was trying to break away from him. Not a sound escaped their lips and silence took over the atmosphere of the office.

Wally, the Arbiter and Auto also eyed the door nervously as well, the former and the third standing behind the Elite's back as he kept his plasma rifle aimed at the door; something he had been doing for the last few moments after Vadumee had not returned. His breathing was short and ragged as if he were about to draw his last breaths. In a way, he likely would with Eve now running around inside the base. With her new abilities, she could very easily kill all of them.

"Auto, are you picking anything up," Michael asked the AI, breaking the silence that had been reigning over them for the last few minutes.

"Nothing yet," he replied with a shake of his head. "Vadumee is moving down a corridor nearby but there's nothing else here." He added with a hint of apprehension in his voice.

"Are you sure?" Richard pressed him, his voice now filling with

anxiety. "I don't want \_her \_getting in!"

"Richard, I can't be sure exactly but I know that Vadumee is-wait!" he suddenly stopped mid-sentence, a tone of surprise in his voice, and all eyes fell on him, anxiously awaiting what he had to report to them. "Oh no!" he breathed, swallowing hard. "He'sâ€|he's gone!"

"What d'you mean he's gone!" Michael cried his eyes now wide with fright.

"Compose yourself!" the Arbiter barked at them vociferously. "Fear is the worst thing that can grip you at such a perilous moment! Do not let it overcome you or you will-"

**\*\*CRASH! \*\***With a sound akin to a ship liner creaking in the dockyard, the metallic door, along with part of the wall, burst open, shattering into large chunks as if a sledgehammer has been used to break it down, throwing up a cloud of dust that momentarily blinded those in the room.

"What the Hell!" Michael shouted; having to grab hold of the desk to stop himself from stumbling backwards as he placed a hand over his mouth and eyes to try and block out the dust.

"Call for security now!" Richard ordered vociferously, stumbling and coughing as he went behind the desk to carry out what he had just said, his hand reaching for the security button under the deskâ€|except something beat him to it, and it was not a hand.

Thin but long and slithery in form, dark green/brown in colour and creeping across the desk slowly like a lion sneaking up on prey on the savannah, he froze and his eyes watched as a tentacle seemed to materialise out of the now disappearing dust cloud. Its grotesque and slightly waving end began to drape itself over the edge of the desk, stopping Richard's hand where it was as if it had frozen it in place. The form of a figure stood in what had been the doorway with its arm stretched out in front of it, which explained the tentacle's origins, and all eyes fell on this figure.

Stepping forward, the movement seemed to blow away the remnants of the dust as the figure that was once Eve entered the room, her eyes now full of concentration and malice as they searched her surroundings, falling on the Elite, the human and the AI to her right. Even though they appeared on first glance to have been devoid of any emotion earlier in the story, they just seemed to hold a sense of loss, anguish, even fear within them when the three had seen her last. No more. Now they seemed to have found a sense of anger, fury, even sadist feelings, and all driven by the will of a single being to which she had been submitted to. As they momentarily surveyed her, realisation of something bad struck the three like a hammer hitting them on the heads.

She was no longer Eve, their friend who had guided, protected and saved them many times, and they having done so in return that they once knew. She was truly a creature of the Flood now.

Suddenly, as if awakened by the sight before her, Eve's other arm rose and swung out towards the three, forming into another tentacle that threw them into the office's right wall with such force that it

was amazing that they did not go through it; the other tentacle wrapping itself around the desk in the blink of an eye. The breaths of Michael and Richard were caught in their throats as the desk was lifted several feet above the floor and then launched like a firing bullet first into Richard, then Michael; the forces of the blows throwing the two men into the back wall, killing them both and breaking the desk in two (the remains were dumped on the floor as they were no further use to the tentacle by this point).

Eve then looked over to the three as they began to pick themselves up off the floor and moved towards them, her arms quickly changing back into arms from their previous horrific state. The Arbiter looked up to see her approaching and made a grab for his plasma rifle, but Eve, in two large strides, rushed up to him and grabbed him by the throat and held him a few inches above the floor above the terrified Wally and Auto; the strangled breaths of the Elite filling their ears.

"Eve!" (gasp) "Evel-lyn!" he gasped, grabbing her arm with his large hands to try and free himself but it was no use; her grip was stronger than he anticipated and she was holding him there like a rag doll. "Le-(cough, gasp) me!" "G-g-go!"

"Eve, please stop!" Wally pleaded, standing up and she looked at him, her concentrated, un-breaking gaze meeting his loose and terrified eyes. "It's us! It's your friends! Don't let us go!" he pressed on, his voice literally begging her to reconsider.

Auto stepped into view from behind Wally's head. "Eve, c'mon snap out of it!" he urged her. "Fight against Chromsar! Don't let him overtake you and make you his puppet!"

Wally reached out and took her free hand in his, their fingers interlocking with each other as if they were morphing to become one, the feeling of his harsh skin rubbing across her smooth and lovely surface, the look in his eyes desperately pleading with her to come back. C'mon, Eve! Snap out of it! Come back to us as your old self!

For a moment, she eyed him with a confused gaze, blinking several times as if they were initiating this change in her observance of him. The colour of her eyes flickered several times from dark green/brown to blue, making it look as if her old self was fighting to break free of the hold it was in and bring back the old Eve, the one who the three cherished, the one who was their friend and hero. A clash of two personalities was ensuing and as Wally and Auto looked on, momentarily looking up to see the Arbiter's eyes flicker as well as he seemed to be close to unconsciousness, hoping for their friend to return.

\*\*"Go Away!" \*\*she snarled at them with a growl as her face's expression changed from confusion to anger, no fury; pure fury like that of an erupting volcano.

Her voice made the two shudder as it sounded like that of a seductive succubus, only with a more devilish tone to it, and she was about to add on how dangerous she could be with such a voice in terms of her actions.

She threw her free arm into Wally and sent him back against the wall

with bone crushing force. Then, turning her attention back to the Elite, whose head was now cocked to one side and lying on her hand, she threw the Arbiter against one of the broken halves of the desk. Good riddance! They were weak and went down easier than she thought!

Turning, now being satisfied but still retaining her hard, icy expression she turned and left the office.

\*\*"Who needs them," \*\*her icy, nerve shuddering voice said in what was barely a whisper as she made her way into the maze of corridors.

She no longer needed them and now that they were out of the way, it was time for her to regroup on the surface with Chromsar. She had him and the Flood to act as her companions and her brethren from now on.

It looked like she really had changed from the Eve we once knew and loved.

## 27. A hard decision

\*\*Some time later\*\*

"Wally! Wally, wake up!"

A stir passed from the lips of the ancient human as he groggily opened his eyes, taking in his blurry surroundings and feeling the repetitive touch on his cheek. Someone was standing over him and was trying to bring him back round, which, to their relief, was beginning to work.

"Wally!" the person, whose voice was masculine, said again with a concerned tone. "Wally, wake up! C'mon!"

Groaning slightly, the Forerunner human rubbed his eyes and looked up at the man standing over him. It was Hood, dressed as always in his white UNSC uniform and his hand outstretched and a look of concern on his face.

"Are you alright?" he asked him.

With another slight groan, Wally nodded and grasped Hood's hand as the elder lifted him up. With the former UNSC commander were three other marines; two of whom were kneeling over the corpses of Richard and Michael against the back wall and the third was helping the Arbiter to his feet as he struggled to pick himself up from the floor. Wally took all this in with a sense of tentativeness and apprehension. Eve had really taken them out fiercely, and with the way she was now there was no telling what mayhem she was up to, wherever she was.

"We got here just in time it seems," Hood said to him as he glanced over momentarily at the Arbiter then back at Wally, noticing that someone was missing. "Where's Auto?"

"Right here!" a voice groaned as a seven inch high, purple coloured avatar appeared on Wally's shoulder from nowhere. "Man, Eve hits hard

when she wants to!" he grunted, rubbing the side of his head to emphasize his point.

Hood stared at him momentarily as if examining him then sighed. "So she \_did\_ do this," he accepted with a grim tone. "I can't believe it!"

"It is true!" the Arbiter, who had by now managed to stabilise himself on his own two feet, his words drawing the attention of everyone else in the room. "She has become one of the Flood and a great danger unless we can do something about her,"

Hood sighed again, rubbing his hand across the back of his head, a thousand questions running through his mind. What were they to do? What could they do? How were they to deal with this new and unprecedented threat that had sprung up from nowhere? All of these questions ran through his mind but none of them he could answer properly, and that was just going along the idea of there actually being answers for them.

"Sir!" a voice called out from the hole in the corridor as another marine appeared where the door had once been, a radio on his back. "Just received word from HQ on the surface. Hostiles are heading straight for Voi's remains and are cutting through the defences there locusts!"

"Damn!" Hood muttered under his breath. "Tell them that we are on our way with support and that any remaining UNSC forces that have not engaged the hostiles are to use whatever means necessary to stop them!"

With a nod, the marine quickly departed to carry out the order, not seeing the shocked expressions that all the others in the office were giving the former UNSC commander.

"Hood!" Auto said, aghast. "Y-you're not â€¦ seriously suggesting â€¦"

"I'm sorry, Auto," he replied, his voice full of regret. "But â€¦ but we have to! It's the only thing we can do now!"

"No!" Wally interjected, grabbing Hood's arm and turning the elder to face him. "Please, we cannot do that! There must be another way!" he begged.

Hood pushed Wally's arm off him and looked directly into his eyes, the firm gaze of the commander meeting that of the pleading and want from the Forerunner human.

"Wally, we have no choice! We have to deal with them now!" he said firmly. "I'm sorry," he added and looked up at all the others. "All of you, but we have only one way of stopping this threat from increasing to a level which we can't contain!"

"You mean â€¦" the Arbiter piped up in a shocked tone, quickly trailing off when he received a nod from Hood. "You cannot be serious!" he pressed with a shake of his head.

Hood nodded. "I am," he replied laconically. "Now let's get going!" and with that, he left the office, his mind racing with what would

happen in the next few hours or so, yet even he could not bring himself to come to terms with what he had just told the group.

They were going to have to kill all the Flood in order to stop this threat, and that meant Eve as well.

\_We're in for a wild time \_was all Hood could mentally say to himself as he led them away towards the surface to carry out this mission.

## 28. The beginning of the end?

**\*\*One hour later\*\***

**\*\*Memorial hill, outskirts of Voi's remains\*\***

If there was one thing that had not changed at all in this part of the Mombasa area, it was the hill designated as 'Memorial Hill' that held the large metallic post of remembrance to the soldiers and civilians that had perished during the Human-Covenant War all those years ago. It was a testament to those who had made the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate decision to save the remnants of humanity from destruction as well as all other life forms in the galaxy. That mission had cost many lives, but here they were remembered for their choice.

If only such places could have survived, but alas even here in this dark time the hill was not spared.

THUD! The body of another UNSC marine fell to the ground alongside three others, having been killed brutally by the person they least expected, the one whom they along with everyone else on earth had regarded as a hero, their saviour. That person, of the one that had been a person, was Evelyn Knight.

As she dropped the body, her dark brown/dark green eyes looked up at what was left of the memorial, it having been partially destroyed during the fight as well as by the forces of time itself. The fight had taken off the top half of the metallic post and parts of the enormous crate that was placed in front of it and where relatives and locals would place flowers in remembrance of the fallen. Time had eroded away and rusted some parts of the post as well, mainly the white letters that had once read **\*\*'In memory of the marines in the defence of Earth and all her colonies' \*\***having been eroded and now were missing some letters or parts of letters; even the entire word 'memory' was now just a faded smudge that was barely readable to anyone who looked upon it. Like many things from the past, we tend to fling them aside after a while and forget about them, or if not forget then at least put them at the back of our minds so they are barely thought of and the looking after the memorial had been one of them in the period of crisis following the end of the war. Now look at it; it was akin to a wreck and it would probably be damaged even more before the day was up.

Turning her head, Eve looked out over the huge hole in the ground that spread for miles ahead of her, having once been covered over by the sands and earth of the savannah where the city of New Mombasa had once stood until it was glassed by the Covenant in the last days of the war. What had been revealed was an enormous, to say the least,

Forerunner structure that was a portal which could take whoever going through anywhere they wished; Eve, Wally, Auto, the Arbiter and many marines and Elites having themselves gone through it on their way to stop Truth. Since then it had remained dormant and people had pretty much forgotten about it, the political and social upheavals having made them do so.

In a way though, for Eve at least, that was good. It gave her less people to deal with. Now all she had to do was wait for Chromsar to return from activating the portal by putting the crystals in place and then they could bring about a new age of Flood into this galaxy.

A purple light suddenly materialised out of nowhere a few metres to her right, drawing her attention to see Chromsar step out of the portal, which disappeared as soon as he left it. His cloaked, mutilated, growth covered body seemed to have a mind of its own as it shifted and moved in waves as if something was trying to break out from inside him. Breathing in a full breath of fresh air, to which he coughed harshly upon doing, he looked up at Eve and walked over to her, a small, sinister smile on his face as he surveyed the fallen bodies around them.

\*\*\*"Excellent work, Evelyn," \*\*he said to her, putting one of his arms on her shoulder and looking out over the portal in front of them. \*\*\*"Your actions here will procure many great things for us both. The warriors of the new age will look to you as the one who began their true lives in this desolate universe. You will be a hero and can forget those fools!"\*\*

Eve glanced up at him momentarily with an expressionless face and then back out at the portal. Chromsar, however, noticed her movement and looked down at her with a concerned expression over his, or what one could make of his face as another bulge swelled up over his cheek.

\*\*\*"Something is troubling you, Evelyn," \*\*he said to her in a tone akin to a worried parent talking to a concerned child. \*\*\*"Tell me what is troubling your mind."\*\*

She opened her mouth and a few strangling noises were uttered, as if she was a new-born trying to learn how to speak. Chromsar clutched her shoulder tightly with his hand and two of fingers became tentacles, both of them slithering down her torso and wrapping themselves around her arm, coming to rest on her hand. To anyone witnessing this, it would be amazing to say the least that these two 'creatures' were able to bond like this considering that had happened to them.

\*\*\*"I â€¦ I â€¦ Hurt them!" \*\*she uttered weakly, a look of sadness coming onto her face.

The pain and suffering she had inflicted on those people she could barely remember now, her mind's advancements into this mutated form having destroyed many past memories of her and her friends. Guilt was beginning to overwhelm her, and Chromsar did not like it at all.

\*\*\*"Leave them out of your cranium, Evelyn!" \*\*he growled softly but dangerously into her ear. \*\*\*"They are not worthy! Forget them! Forget



the past and embrace this new beginning!"\*\*

For a moment, she held her head in a fixed position, her eyes unblinking and expression lost as if she was a statue, left to watch over the land and witness the passing of time and man. Then, slowly, she nodded.

\*\*\*"Forget," \*\*she said. \*\*\*"Forget them all!"\*\*

Chromsar smiled. \*\*\*"Perfect," \*\*he said. \*\*\*"Now â€|" \*\*He looked up at the sky and saw a pair of pelicans coming towards them, both covered in thick growths and were actually struggling to stay airborne, a rather humorous sight for such dangerous creatures. \*\*\*"â€| The portal shall be activated and we will lead the Flood into a new age." \*\* He added as the pelicans continued towards them, dropping and rising as they went.

Unfortunately, and rather humorously, one of the pelicans suddenly dropped too far and slammed into the ground about two hundred feet from their position. The fireball consumed all that were on board and burned the pelican to a crisp, leaving a scowl that rivalled anything angry a human face could conjure up on Chromsar's face.

\*\*\*"Pathetic fools!" \*\*he snarled angrily at the burning wreckage. \*\*\*"No wonder they are inferior!"\*\*

A giggle from next to him caught his attention and looking upon the source he glared deeper at Eve as she quickly tried to remove the small smile from her face. The giggle had not been one of sadism, but of simple innocence as if she did not understand what had just happened. Then again, with her mind being controlled and messed up and, in a sense, reborn again under this new influence it was not really much of a surprise.

\*\*\*"Evelyn!" \*\*he growled at her and she buried her head in her shoulders, her eyes nervously glancing up at his deathly intimidating gaze from his single eye. It was something that made her shudder, and Chromsar could feel it.\*\* "You are wise to feel that way about me!" \*\*he added icily. \*\*\*"Mocking me alone, the simplest of all insulting ways, is a grave mistake in itself. Now come!" \*\*

He grabbed her arm and led her over to the other pelican that had managed to land 'safely' on the ground, through which it had quite literally crashed into the ground and shattered the cog pit and parts of the sides, but was still flyable, and pushed her on board. She felt his push with a sense of apprehension and could sense it as well as he entered, shoving aside one of the two remaining Flood creatures aside as he marched over to the cog pit. Determination was what was driving him now and it was apparent that he would not let anything, or anyone, get in his way.

\*\*\*"Ascend and head towards the sky above the portal!" \*\*he barked at the Flood form that had attached itself to the growths over the control panel in the cog pit; these seeming to have a life of their own as the pelican quickly rose and, tilting a little, turned and flew back up into the air.

Then he left the cog pit and walked back over to Eve and placed one of his tentacle arms on her cheek and wrapped it around the top of her head; looking into her rather surprised and apprehensive gaze. It

was clear she was not comfortable with this but he reassured with a gentle smile. He meant her no harm at least that is what can be perceived by the reader but with his character being the way it is it was unlikely.

"\*\*All I need now Evelyn is your mind for you have the mental connection as well as the physical capability to re-activate Forerunner technology," \*\*he said to her as he placed his other hand delicately on her cheek as if to try and woo her. \*\*"Now hold still and let me enter your head."\*\*

Eve nodded submissively and almost at once her head felt like it had been smashed into a thousand pieces as she watched the world rush past in a blur. Clouds swirled, noises of all creatures, animal, human and alien, filled her ears, ever stretching images of earthly landscapes and stars in an ever stretching blackness; all of it filled her ears, accompanied by an array of sounds that were impossible to distinguish individually as they were all emanating at the same time! The walls of her mind were like glass as it shattered and gave way to the powerful battering ram that was Chromsar, his desire and own intellectual mind cruising through her brain, her memories, her very self in search of that one thing; the deep mental connection that was needed for the portal to be activated.

During all of this, Eve winced several times and her head shook slightly as if it were about to suddenly pop off her shoulders, drool running down her chin and eyes flickering. To her, this was something akin to one of her past fits but a more controlled fit and one that had been started up intentionally by someone else rather than it being instantaneous and uncontrollable.

Then, like a speeding car hitting the brakes, it all stopped and Chromsar, looking now as if he was satisfied as a rather gruesome smile crept upon his lips, revealing his crooked and partially black/brown teeth that looked as if they had never even heard of the word dentist or anything related to that profession, turned his head and barked out the following.

"\*\*Prepare to go through the portal and into the Andromeda galaxy!" \*\*he paused and wiped a fleck of froth and spit from his mouth with the back of his hand. \*\*"Life will take a new evolutionary and beneficial course from this point on! Let the inhabitants of this feeble galaxy rue the day they abhorred their liberators and their bringers of greatness and-"\*\*

\_"\*\*"STOP!"\*\*\_"

## 29. The final confrontation

When the echo of an unlocking-like sound rolled across the plains of the savannah and through the streets of the nearby settlements, people and animals alike looked up in bewilderment to what the source of it was. Some, predominantly wildlife, fled the area for fear of them not having heard noises such as this before, others, obviously human, began to mutter amongst themselves over the noise and what it could lead to and why it was happening. Was it a new UNSC weapon of some kind? Was it another bomb attack, or was it something alien arriving on earth?

That last thought made the blood of many people run cold and their minds think almost instinctively of the war and all the events that had taken place during it, especially around this area where much of the fighting had taken place in the last days of the Covenant presence on earth and where this new species called the 'Flood' had made an appearance. One or two who had heard the noise did think that maybe \_those things\_ had returned or were attempting a coma back.

Oh, how right they are at this moment.

The many pillars thousands of feet in length lifted from the metallic surface that was the base of the portal structure, neon blue lights coursing across from the centre of it to the pillars and then shooting up them like snakes slithering up a tree trunk. The U shaped ends on each of the pillars all lit up like a blue sun for a split second and then fired out a ray of light at a single point in the sky directly above the centre of the structure's base, forming a ball that then broke apart in a circle and spread out, seemingly breaking the sky in two. It stopped directly in line around the structure's edge and within the confines of the circle the air had turned black, completely black.

This was the portal that had been activated before during the war; able to take anyone where they wanted or bring people back from wherever it was they were located at to earth. And this was where the Flood controlled pelican was heading to right now.

That was, however, if the new and sudden arrivals on the craft did not stop them.

\*\*\*"WHAT IS THIS?!" \*\*Chromsar roared in both surprise and fury as he, Eve and the two remaining Flood forms stared at the new arrivals standing at the pelican's entrance. \*\*\*"You three will pay for your interference!"\*\*

The three whom he was roaring at with rage were Wally, Auto and the Arbiter who had been flown up to the craft by the first of them, determined to free Eve and stop Chromsar.

After getting out of the base with Hood, the former UNSC commander had organized a strike force to attack the area and kill all there, though this was quickly falling apart after Eve had killed all the soldiers at the agreed meeting point that had been the old memorial hill. Afterwards, Wally, the Arbiter and Auto had told Hood that they had to deal with Chromsar and that they could still get Eve back, something that he did not accept in the slightest and told them to stay behind whilst a strike force was sent out to find and kill the Flood. Auto had managed to disable any tracking of them as Wally, carrying the Arbiter, lifted them up into the air and flew after the pelican as fast as his anti-gravity boots would allow him to go. It seems they had arrived just in the nick of time, but Chromsar was not going to give up that easily.

"You're not getting away with this, Chromsar," Auto said to the Flood humanoid.

\*\*\*"Oh I will be!" \*\*he replied through gritted teeth, brown saliva seeping through his teeth and running down his lips. \*\*\*"Creatures, I command you to kill them all!" \*\*he commanded in a voice that seemed

to reverberate across the world as he pushed the two huge forms of Flood forward.

Both of them charged at the three almost immediately as their leader had ordered but their targets were ready for them.

As the two hulking masses of overgrown, rotting flesh threw themselves towards the three, the arbiter ducked and, like a ninja whipping out his sword, activated his energy weapon and thrust it deep into the 'chest' of the creature. Using its momentum, along with his own strength, he threw it out of the back of the craft, the roars of the creature filling his ears as it fell to the metallic base that seemed to be miles below.

Wally, on the other hand, had been thrown out of the pelican by the second creature, its enormous arm now shifting into something of a spear made of mutilated growths. As they both fell towards the earth, the creature swung its arm at him, but he dodged it. Auto, holding onto Wally's hair, slammed his hand onto the end of the creature's arm that was grasping Wally around the shoulder and it let go with a roar; a crackle of electricity filling their ears.

Seeing his chance, Wally quickly activated his anti-gravity boots and flew off back up to the pelican, having to duck to avoid a swing from the tentacle of the creature as it too disappeared. That was close, but the adrenaline pumping through his veins and the hyper-activity going on in his brain made it clear that it was not over yet. They still had to rescue Eve and stop Chromsar and he was determined as ever to save her before it was too late for all of them.

Flying back up to the pelican, Wally readied the weapon within the bulge on his arm for a confrontation with Chromsar. But as he reached the craft's entrance, he was suddenly thrown against with such force that he could have sworn he felt a dent on his back. He seemed to lose consciousness for a second before kicking back in and that was when he realised that a tentacle had wrapped itself around his chest, its end now slithering up onto his shoulder. Although it had no eyes, Wally thought it looked set on wrapping itself around his neck and crushing him like a boa wrapping itself around its prey.

\*\*\*"How very unwise of you, Forerunner!" \*\*Chromsar said as he walked behind Eve, who had both the now tentacle arms raised and they were holding Wally and the Arbiter against the wall of the pelican; the latter struggling with his arms but with the end of the vices like steel it was hopeless. \*\*\*"You should never have pursued us in our mission. Now you will pay the price." \*\*He stopped by the pelican's entrance and, with a quick glance out the back as if to make sure they were high enough, said to Eve. \*\*\*"Throw them out of the ship!"\*\*

\*\*\*"As you command," \*\*Eve replied, her voice now having become raspy and there even a few gurgling sounds within it, now heading over to the pelican's entrance.

Wally and the Arbiter began to struggle fiercely against her hold on them, but she seemed to be unhindered in the slightest as she pulled them away from the wall and held them just feet from the ramp in mid-air. Adrenaline ploughed through their veins to an unprecedented level but they could do little as the insurmountable strength of their former friend tightened its hold on them and it began to get

painful, \_very \_painful.

"Eve stop!" Wally exclaimed desperately but she ignored him, something that made Chromsar smile, revealing once again his brown/dark green teeth that were each formed into such a shape that they looked as though they were rotting away. It was amazing to learn that they were not.

"\*\*As you can see, she is no longer allied to you in any way! She is \*\*\_\*\*mine\*\*\_\*\*!" \*\*he told them, his voice low and chilling\*\*. "Crush them and drop them Evelyn! Let us be rid of them once and for all!" \*\*he commanded defiantly as if he were some hero disposing of a heretic or some kind of long lasting foe, which, to Chromsar's point of view, is what he and Eve were doing.

Her tentacles began to crawl up and down their bodies and wrap themselves around their limbs. Eve showed little or no emotion as she began to squeeze down on them but Chromsar's smile widened (making it look all the more disturbing). No more were they going to be interrupted or threatened with death by these two fools that had dared to come after them, oh no! Now they were going to end the threat they posed. Victory would be theirs, and it was all a swift movement and a few more minutes of flying away.

\*\*CRACK! "WHAT THEâ€|?! "\*\*

Eve cried out in pain and recoiled, stumbling backwards and smacking her head onto the floor as another crackle of electricity flared across her tentacles; the noise of what sounded like a large piece of bubble wrapping being twisted and squeezed and all the bubbles of air popping in unison filling the air. Chromsar, along with Wally and the Arbiter, were stunned, but the latter quickly took the advantage and, after Wally grabbed the Arbiter before the Elite fell to his death, they launched themselves at Chromsar. The Flood humanoid, however, saw us coming and quickly threw out his arm, pinning both against the wall. He then used his other arm and pinned Auto's avatar, who had tried to use his energy once again to strike Chromsar, against the wall as well.

"\*\*You meat puppets!" \*\*he growled at them through gritted teeth, his mind clouded with anger as he leaned in close to them. His breath was horrible and made them retch to the point where they were certain they would vomit. "\*\*I will kill you all myself!"\*\*

"No!" a female voice snarled from behind him, drawing the four's attention to see Eve standing up from the floor, glaring at them deeply. "They're mine!" she growled at him, their eyes meeting each other in an intense standoff.

For a moment, Chromsar looked at her, as if looking straight through her; his suddenly emotionless expression meeting her stern and concentrated face. Silence hung between them like a cloud, both waiting to see how the other would react. Then, with a light growl, Chromsar nodded and, though still holding the two against the wall, stepped aside.

"\*\*Very well, Evelyn,"\*\* he muttered calmly as she approached the two and wrapped her tentacle arms around them, looking deeply into their terrified eyes.

"Eve, stop! C'mon, snap out of it!" Auto exclaimed desperately.

"Evelyn you must listen to us! Break free of this monster's control!" the Arbiter said to her but again she ignored them both as she took them over to the pelican entrance and held them out.

"Eve, this is not you!" Wally pleaded with her and she turned her head to look at him, meeting his terrified hazel eyes with her blue eyes. "Have we lost you?"

Her reply was laconic and brusque. "Yes," as one of her eyes momentarily shut and then opened again at him.

"\*\*And how correct she is," \*\*Chromsar added as he walked up to her before thrusting out his arm at the two captives, knocking them both out of her tentacle grip before grabbing her round the neck with his hand and pushing her against the wall of the pelican.

"\*\*And you have lost yourself with them, Evelyn Knight!" \*\*as he leant in close to her once more, raising his other arm that began to form into a spear, which her eyes grew wide upon seeing but quickly glared back at him.

Unbeknownst to the two, Wally had managed to save the Elite and Auto from certain death and was now heading back up to the pelican as fast as he could, determination rushing through their veins like water rushing through a floodgate. They had to save Eve! \_They had to, they had to!\_ The pelican was now just a few hundred metres from the portal, and likely the countless hordes of Flood on the other side that were waiting for their leader to give them the word to pass through and infest the galaxy once more.

This was to be their last confrontation before all they knew, before they themselves ended.

As they reached the pelican once more, however, Wally stopped dead in mid-air and stared with utter disbelief in his eyes at the scene before him, as did the Arbiter and Auto.

This, my fellow readers, is the scene that was presented to them. Eve lay on the floor of the pelican across the feet of Chromsar, and not on them, but \_across\_. He himself lay on the floor alongside her, a large wound visible in his side. Eve's tentacles had now disappeared but her body lay unmoving as the craft rose higher into the air.

When Chromsar had gone to strike Eve with his spear arm, he had also attempted to take away the Flood mutation within her. He succeeded in both, the end of his spear driving deep into her now completely human stomach, but not before she too had struck him with her own clawed arm. He had realised this when he looked down and, with a gasp, collapsed onto the floor and lay still, dropping Eve in the process and leaving the two un-moving on the floor, still as fallen statues frozen in time.

That is what the three were presented with and for a moment none of them moved as if they themselves were frozen in time, their faces blank of any expression other than that of shock. Then, as if something within them had re-awakened, Wally shot forward into the

pelican, dropping the Arbiter and Auto, and quite literally skidded across the metallic floor to her and, with one on the back of her head, lifting it up gently for fear of worsening her injuries, placed her on his lap.

"Eve!" he breathed, his voice quivering with fear and sadness as he gave her a light shake but received no response. "Eve! No! You have to be alive!"

"Oracle!" the Arbiter exclaimed as he rushed over and knelt down next to him, his eyes now also full of fear and disbelief.

Auto appeared on Wally's shoulder, a hand clasped over his mouth. "Oh my God!" he breathed as he slowly moved it from over his mouth, shaking his head in disbelief.

Wally had to fight hard to hold back tears as they began to form in his eyes but it was no use and very quickly they began to run down his cheeks. The Arbiter too looked like he would break down but he was doing a very good job in not doing so. Auto had his head in hands and was on his knees on Wally's shoulder, looking at Eve with wet eyes, his electronic, A.I heart breaking as if it had been shattered with a sledgehammer.

None of them could believe it. Eve â€| their friend, their hero, their saviour! The one who had saved them, the galaxy and countless billions of other life forms from certain death â€| she was g-g-gone! She was not replying in any way to them and blood was beginning to seep from her wound onto Wally's lap, turning her white bodysuit a scarlet colour.

"Ah!" all of a sudden, Eve gasped and coughed harshly, spitting up some blood onto her chest.

For a moment the three were relieved, their hopes soaring high once again as if they were going to heaven; Eve was saved! They could finally end this mission and take her back to where she would be safe, a sort of payment if one wanted to be comical of all those times that she had saved them in the past. However it was short lived when they saw that her breathing decrease to a weakened state, and deteriorating further! Instinct grasped them like a giant invisible hand and Wally gently picked her up as he stood up from the floor.

"We must get her medical attention quickly!" he cried as he lightly groaned and coughed again.

"Give her here, Oracle," the Arbiter replied, taking Eve from him before he could reply and rushed over to the pelican entrance and looked down at the metallic surface that appeared to be miles below. "How are we to get back down there?" he asked himself.

That was a hard question. Wally could not take both Eve and the Arbiter and, with a glance by the three through the cog pit entrance and the windscreen, they saw the blackness of the portal now just only a hundred metres away and closing, meaning they had to be quick or this was it! But how?! Damn it, how were they to get down?!

"\_Auto, this is Delta 589, do you read me, over?" \_a voice said from

Auto's avatar suddenly.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Auto immediately connected himself with the transmission sent by the pelican. "Roger that. We have Eve and need extraction on the double!" he replied, his tone desperate.

"Copy, Auto. Hang on tight!" \_the pilot replied.

Despite the danger and the shortening time for Eve, the three looked at each other, puzzled. What did he mean by 'hang on ti'

THUD! The pelican rocked wildly, nearly throwing them out of the ship as they heard a loud noise that sounded like something grasping the edges of the ship's exterior. A rope fell down from above the edge line of the pelican's entrance, dangling in mid-air in front of them. Immediately, Wally hovered out of the pelican and took Eve from the Arbiter as the Elite climbed the rope and was helped into the pelican by a waiting marine. Wally then hovered into the pelican and, with a shout of everything being clear from the marine, the pilots released the grappling on the pelican below and sped back to earth as fast as it could go.

The marine was silent when he saw Wally set Eve down on the seats along the pelican's walls, his [the marine's] face having a look of hopelessness etched across it.

"My God!" he breathed as he surveyed the wound, being fixed on it momentarily before rushing to the cog pit and exclaiming to the pilots to 'step on it', which they willingly did, making the craft shake a little as its velocity increased on its descent back to earth.

Wally placed a hand on Eve's and clutched it tight, praying that she would make it through. The Arbiter too looked on helplessly at her body, the blood from her wound now falling onto the chair. The marine came back out from the cog pit and, after retrieving some boxes from under the seat, began to apply some bandages to the wound.

"I hope she'll be okay," Auto muttered as he looked down at her slowly dying body.

The Arbiter nodded but then remembered something. "What of Chromsar?" he asked his voice full of alarm and concern. "Should we shoot him down?"

Auto shook his head. "He won't be bothering us anymore," he replied, leaving the Arbiter confused.

What the A.I had meant by his statement was that when they had rescued Eve from the pelican Chromsar and the Flood had hijacked, Auto had automatically activated the pelican's self-destruct sequence. Anything and anyone that happened to be on board when the timer hit zero would meet a fiery end.

Now as the pelican passed through the portal's hole and found itself within the deep vastness of space that was within the Andromeda galaxy, Chromsar stirred and picked himself up, rubbing his head. He groaned loudly and scanned his surroundings, seeing the portal far out behind the pelican through its entrance and then saw that he was



alone.

"\*\*That filthy human and her companions!" \*\*he growled to himself, the memories of what had just happened to him minutes ago flooding back into his mind. "\*\*I will-"\*\*

"\_Self-destruct sequence initiating in three ..." \_a computerised voice emanated from within the craft, stopping him mid-sentence as he scanned his surroundings to try and determine its location. \_"Two ... one â€| zero."\_

Upon that last word Chromsar's eyes, both of which had revealed sadness, happiness, anger and hatred for the last few days, showed to have one emotion that seemed impossible for someone like him; fear.

And upon that note, the pelican exploded.

### 30. Life has finally found its peace

\*\*Twelve hours later\*\*

Silence. That was all that hung in the air around the four as they waited within the corridors of the hospital outside the room where Eve had been taken after her wounds had been attended to. Worry had perpetually gnawed away at them like termites on wood, threatening to make them break down in despair. They had not been able to comprehend that she had been injured in that way; for a normal human a deep wound to the abdomen was very often fatal and Eve was no exception.

Right now, Wally sat on the floor with Auto sitting on his shoulder; the former with his knees brought up to his chest, his arms wrapped around them in a hug as if to try and find some comfort in them and his head resting on the top of them; fear emanating from his eyes. Auto was pretty much in the same position, only he had a closed fist over his mouth as if holding something within it. The Arbiter was leaning against the wall opposite the two, the door to Eve's room next to him on his left, with his arms folded and his head looking at the ground; a look of concern and sombreness etched across his face, which was adding to his mood by his foot tapping the floor. On the seats to his right, Hood sat with his face covered by his hands up to the ridge of his nose as he sat leaning forward in his seat; his eyes also full of worry as well; he having joined them as soon as the pelican he had sent out earlier had returned and his eyes had fallen on Eve's wounded form. His order to take her to the nearest hospital as quickly as they could might have saved her life.

Though that was emphasising heavily the word \_might\_.

All four of them were worried sick about her, constantly playing over in their minds the possibility that the doctor would emerge and tell them their worst nightmare. No! They would tell themselves that repeatedly and push the thought out of their mind, only for it to return minutes later; it was driving them mad. Wally just wanted to burst into the room and see for himself if Eve was going to be okay; then again, the other three were likely thinking the same thing and would probably not stop him if he tried to do so.

Suddenly the door opened, causing all four to snap out of their trances and look up at him; Wally, Auto and Hood shooting to their feet as if the places they had been sitting on were on fire. Eight pairs of eyes looked at the doctor who returned with an empty expression.

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Minutes later, the four entered the room and took in the scene before them.

Lying in the bed next to the window, covered up to just below her neck by the bed sheets, was Eve; her face locked in a state of sleep and her arms resting by her sides on the covers. The afternoon sun shone through the glass and onto her bed as if it were God himself looking down at her. Though she had suffered a terrible wound, the four could not help but note that she looked so peaceful, as if they were going to visit her in her normal state before all of this had happened. She was truly beautiful when at peace like this.

For a moment, they remained where they were, glancing at each other as if wary to make the move to her bed themselves in case she suddenly attacked them, or worse.

Finally, Wally, with Auto still on his shoulder, walked over to the bed with the Arbiter and Hood in tow; the former sitting down on the side of it and gently taking her hand in his; feeling the soft smoothness of her skin in his rough hands. A sigh passed his lips as he stared at her face, taking in the lovely features and the faint scars that were the marks of war and suffering that would remain with her forever as memorials to all she had faced over the past six years.

Wally gently interlocked his fingers with Eve's and leant forward and kissed her on her forehead, muttering an: "I love you," to her, holding his position as he allowed Auto to kiss her cheek and hug it for a moment before Wally withdrew.

Eve's fingers then closed around his and with a light groan he groggily opened her eyes to see the faces of her friends. Weakly, she smiled.

"H-hey!" she whispered to them. "I wondered where you guys were!" she said to them.

Hood smiled. "We've been here all this time, Eve," he said to her as he walked over to the bed and gently hugged her around her neck and then withdrew. "You scared us for a moment. We thought we'd lost you."

She gave a weak chuckle. "You gotta do more to get rid of me," she replied as she tried sitting up in her bed; Wally and Hood giving her a hand in doing so and the latter moved aside to allow the Arbiter to step forward.

"I am glad to see you are near full recovery, Evelyn," he told her, bending down and embracing her as well, being careful not to put too much stress on her body so as her bandages around her abdomen would not tear. He withdrew and added: "You truly are a hero to us all."

She gave a small chuckle. "Where have I not heard that before," she replied, then realised something. "Hey!w-where's Chromsar? What happened?"

"He's gone, Eve." Auto told her, receiving a shocked look from her, this news having made her blue eyes open more fully now, and he explained to her what had happened with Wally and the Arbiter chipping in as well every now and then.

When he was done, Eve smiled and exhaled deeply in relief. "So that's it then," she said, looking up at the ceiling and then out of the window at the afternoon sun as it began to set, soon to bring about the night that would reveal the trillions upon trillions of stars of the night sky. "It's over."

Wally nodded. "It is," he told her as she looked up at him. "You've saved us all, Eve, and we are very grateful for what have done for us."

She smiled at him and the others. "I couldn't have done it without you guys, though," she responded quietly and, surprisingly, shifted so that she brought her legs out from under the covers and onto the floor, ignoring the protests of the boys as she stood up at her restored human height, opening her arms out and partially revealing the bandages under gown. "Come here you guys." she said.

Repressing their angst for her, they all hugged her tightly and she them. "Thank you all for saving me," She said in a quiet, but undeniably jovial tone as she withdrew, keeping her hand clutched to Wally's, who smiled at her and she smiled back at him.

Outside, the afternoon sun began to allow the distant colours of the night seep across the sky, soon to herald the darkness that would show the true beauty of the place above the earth, the home of humanity where, despite all the troubles, life and normality would eventually return.

Life had finally found its peace.

**\*\*Author's note\*\***

**\*\*Greetings fellow FF readers and writers.\*\***

**\*\*I have to say the last four years writing this series have been brilliant, tiring, annoying, frustrating, amusing and unspeakably amazing. I have enjoyed it so much and am glad to have been supported by the thousands who have read this series. I would like to apologize for the long time this FF took as college work, summer work and now university work have occupied much of my time, as well as other FF's this year.\*\***

**\*\*However, like all series, this one must also come to an end and this sadly is it. I will say once more, however, that I will never forget the praise, criticism and enjoyment that it brought to me and all who have read and will continue to read it over the past four years and the years to come. Thank you all very much!\*\***

**\*\*Now stay tuned for more FF's in the near future; Frozen is my next target now and my newest FF will be put up there soon. Until then, peace be upon you all.\*\***

End  
file.